THE KINGDOM OF EARTH

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY A·B·WENZELL

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THE KINGDOM OF EARTH

"I am glad," she said softly, "that there is going to be one more evening, even though it is all make-believe."

[*Frontispiece.* *See p.* 237

THE
Kingdom of Earth

By ANTHONY PARTRIDGE

Author of "Passers-By," "The Distributors," etc.

With Four Illustrations
By A. B. WENZELL

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THE KINGDOM OF EARTH

CHAPTER I

THEY sat side by side on one of the many seats which fringed the tiny lake high up among the mountains. The sun shone down upon them from a cloudless sky. A little band on the balcony played the liveliest of music. The people around laughed and talked and flirted. The hum of the skates upon the clear, black ice was a music in itself. The man and the girl were perhaps the soberest couple there.

"You mean," she asked, breaking a silence which had lasted for several minutes, "that you are going away at once?"

"I fear so," he answered. "Not only that, but I am going back into a different life. I wonder, can you realize what it means, when one comes to my age, to go back into a different life?"

"How old are you?" she asked.

"I am thirty-three," he answered. "I feel older, I believe that I look older. I am very sure that after a few years of the life that lies before me I shall never know what it is to feel young again."

"Is there any compulsion, then," she asked, "about your going?"

"There is the compulsion which pulls always at a man who tries to do what he believes is right," he answered. "For myself, I believed until a few hours ago that my life was my own, to do what I would with, to shape according to my pleasure. If I may, I will tell you this, that up here among the mountains there have come to me only lately ideas and hopes which were rapidly growing dear to me; and now all this is changed. Something has been thrust upon me which I cannot refuse to take, something which means the abnegation of many of my desires. I am called, perhaps, into a greater sphere of life than any I could reasonably have hoped to occupy, and yet ——"

"And yet?" she whispered softly.

"If I could have had my own choice," he said, "there is another and a simpler road which I would have chosen toward happiness."

Then again there was silence between them. The girl waited, but he said no more. Then she rose and glanced toward the clock which hung from the little pavilion.

"Come," she said, "it will be time for luncheon in half an hour, and we have had only one waltz this morning. There goes the music."

They glided away, and the exercise soon brought back the colour to her cheeks. Every one watched them, for not only were they the most graceful performers, but they were interesting people. The girl, rich, half American,

popular, and beautiful; the man, good-looking, absolutely distinguished, entirely mysterious. Only, at the hotel she was the friend of everybody, easily the most popular and sought-after person among either sex. He, on the contrary, affected reserve, lived in private rooms, and showed himself very seldom, except on his return from long skeeing expeditions, or on the ice. They waltzed until the music stopped, and then stood together for a moment near the wooden steps.

"You are coming back to luncheon, at all events?" she asked.

He shook his head gravely and pointed outside, to where a sleigh with four horses, and laden with luggage, was waiting.

"I am posting to Maloya," he said. "I want, if I can, to catch the Engadine Express. I came down here because it was my only chance of saying good-bye to you."

She looked him full in the face. "It is to be good-bye, then?" she asked.

He answered her with the grave, uncompromising Puritanism which somehow or other she had always associated with him. "It is to be good-bye, Miss Pellisier," he said, holding her hand for a second in his.

A few moments later she heard the tinkle of his sleigh-bells as he rode away. A small crowd of men gathered

round to help her off with her skates, and afterward she walked up to the hotel, the centre of a very lively party indeed; but when she got into her room she locked the door, and she was half an hour late for luncheon!

"On the contrary," the girl declared, lowering her lorgnette, and looking up toward the man who had addressed her, "I am extremely interested. I love watching a crowd of people at any time. I think that this is quite delightful!"

"If only that idiot of a waiter would bring our coffee," her companion remarked, glancing around irritably. "We have been here nearly twenty minutes."

"The poor man has so much to do," the girl answered composedly. "The place is simply packed. Don't worry about the coffee, but go on telling me who the people are — the heavy gentleman, with the pasty face and the long hair, for instance."

Her companion readjusted his eye-glass and leaned forward in his chair. "He is a pianist from Australia," he announced. "I have forgotten his name. The lady with him sings at the opera. The people behind are stock-brokers—very rich indeed. They have a magnificent place in Hertfordshire, and he motors up to town every day — nearly forty miles."

"The small man with the pince-nez?"

He shook his head. "You have me this time. He is probably, by his black tie and dinner-coat, a travelling American. A Sunday-night restaurant crowd is the most cosmopolitan in the world, you must remember."

"I know," she answered. "That is the most delightful part of it. One can see one's own people anywhere. It is these other types which fascinate me."

He looked at her curiously. She represented to him an enigma which as yet he had made no progress whatever in solving. She was still a young woman — she could scarcely be more than twenty-five — an aristocrat by birth, wealthy, and astonishingly beautiful. She had read many books on abstruse subjects, the titles of which even were unknown to him, she was reported to have given large sums of money to the English labour party, and she was a member of a very advanced society of Socialists; and with it all she was a painstaking and accomplished actress at one of the best known and most exclusive of London theatres. Her desire to come here, her interest in this gathering, puzzled him. Yet it was without doubt honest. Perhaps she was going to take after her maternal grandmother, a brilliant French novelist. Some likeness to the miniatures and paintings of that wonderful old lady he seemed to be able to detect in the broad forehead, the dark, soft eyes, the small but determined mouth, of the girl who sat by his side, her eyes following always the constant

stream of people who passed out from the restaurant to their seats in the lounge.

The scarlet-coated band began to play; the girl's attention wandered for a moment to the music. Most of the people by now had found seats, and the scene was, in its way, a brilliant one. Through the glass partition which separated the restaurant from the lounge, one could catch glimpses of the late diners, seated at tables lit with shaded lamps and laden with flowers; the foyer itself was crowded now with groups of men and women, the hum of whose conversation at times almost drowned the music. The girl, with her aunt and escort, occupied seats only a few yards from the central aisle, under a huge palm-tree. They themselves were sufficiently observed. The man, Colonel Sir Gilbert Ferringhall, was known — by sight — to almost every one. He was the representative of an ancient and rich family, a popular member of the best service clubs, a great sportsman, and the intimate friend of his sovereign. The aunt was noticeable, perhaps, for nothing but a quiet and tired distinction. The girl was not only the most beautiful person in the room, but she was beautiful in a wholly singular and unusual way. Her neck was long almost to a fault, but it was white and shapely, and around it there hung simply one roughly cut, gleaming blue stone, fastened by a thin gold chain. Her dress was of the same shade of deep blue, toned down by a

gossamer-like web of black. Her features were pale, but less with an actual pallor than with the ivory tint which goes with perfect health. Her teeth were whiter and her lips more scarlet than the usual English type. Her eyes were deep and soft, but she had a trick of half closing them, as though she were short-sighted. Her face, as a whole, notwithstanding its perfections, seemed to lack the animal happiness of her age and sex. The expression of the mouth, of the eyes when she looked at you, was elusive. Even Ferringhall, who during a long career of popular bachelordom had made almost a science of his studies in femininity, felt himself unable to place her.

The stream of people on their way out from the restaurant began to thin. A hopeless family gathering was followed by a straggling line of nondescripts. The girl stifled a yawn and sipped her coffee, which had just arrived. Suddenly the animation returned to her face. She leaned a little forward in her seat and touched her companion upon the arm.

"Tell me," she demanded eagerly, "who is that?"

Ferringhall abandoned his conversation with her aunt, and adjusting his eye-glass followed the motion of her head. A tall, well-built man had issued from the dining-room alone, and was glancing indifferently around in search of a seat. He was clean-shaven, his hair was as black as coal, and there were lines upon his face deeper than any

which time alone could have engraved. His skin was dry and slightly bronzed, his eyes were bright and penetrating. He walked with a distinct military bearing; his movements, as he quietly took possession of a chair exactly opposite to them, were characterized by a certain deliberation which seemed almost temperamental. He crossed his legs, leaned back in his chair, and lighting a cigarette looked leisurely around him. His eyes met the girl's, full of vivid and unrestrained curiosity, not unmingled with recognition. Ferringhall was bending toward her.

"I am afraid," he said, "that as a showman I am turning out a failure. The man's face seems familiar to me, but I cannot place him."

"It is familiar to me, also," the girl said. "I want to know who he is."

Her aunt leaned a little forward. "Unless you wish him to come and speak to us," she remarked drily, "I should look somewhere else for a few moments."

"If I thought that my looking would bring him," the girl answered, "I would simply go on staring."

Ferringhall raised his eyebrows a little dubiously. "I wonder," he said, "what there is about the man that attracts you so much?"

She smiled very slightly and turned toward him. "Look at the others," she answered, "and look at him. Look at them!" The slight sweep of her hand seemed to

gather into one conglomerate mass the whole motley crowd of chattering, laughing people. "They are of the Kingdom of the Earth — every one of them. Is n't it there in their faces? You 've seen them go by in streams. They were like a flock of sheep, picturesque in their way, perhaps, but there is n't one whom you 'd recognize to-morrow."

"And our friend opposite?" Ferringhall asked.

"You do not need me to tell you that there are different things in his face," she answered.

"He has n't the appearance of a saint, exactly," Ferringhall said thoughtfully.

She shrugged her shoulders daintily. "What man has?" she declared, with emphasis.

"To what kingdom then ——" he began.

She smiled a little vaguely. "You are inclined to be elementary to-night," she remarked. "Do you want me to believe that you know of no other kingdoms than the kingdoms of heaven and earth?"

He stroked his moustache reflectively. He was beginning to realize that the position of escort to this young woman, beautiful though she was and unaccountably distinguished, had its drawbacks.

"You mean ——" he commenced cautiously.

"Oh! never mind what I mean," she interrupted, laughing. "It is so tiresome to explain."

A flash of inspiration lent venom to his tongue. "You think that he" — inclining his head toward the man opposite — "would have understood?"

"I am sure that he would," she answered lightly.

He turned to talk to her aunt. Courtesy demanded it, even if he had not himself felt the necessity of inflicting some sort of a rebuke upon this brilliant but flippant young person. But in the midst of his conversation he broke off suddenly. The girl and he exchanged glances. They had both been witnesses to the same incident.

Two young men, they were little more than boys, had come out of the restaurant arm in arm. Simultaneously, in the midst of their conversation, they had caught sight of the man who sat smoking alone, with his head resting upon his hand and his eyes fixed upon vacancy. Apparently surprised, they nevertheless acted without hesitation. They drew a little apart, their bodies seemed to stiffen, their heels came together as though by instinct, and they bowed very low indeed to the man, whose eyes had now been attracted by their coming. What followed was the strangest part of the affair. The man to whom their salute was proffered, calmly and deliberately ignored it; his eyes, cold and set, seemed to look through the two young men. He neither smiled nor inclined his head in any way. It was more than any ordinary cut. It was a deliberate refusal to recognize in himself the person to

whom those two young men had bent their knees. After the first moment's pause, they had hurried on. They passed through the rest of the room, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and climbed the stairs. The girl looked appealingly toward her companion.

"You know Mr. Vlasto, don't you, Sir Gilbert?" she said. "You must go after them and find out who that is. I cannot leave this room before I know."

Ferringhall was himself interested. With a bow to the elder lady he hurried after the two young men. He found them standing in a retired corner of the entresol, talking in a low tone, and went over to them at once.

"My young friend," he said, resting his hand upon the shoulder of the elder of the two, "you are in luck. I congratulate you!"

The young man laughed a little dubiously. "I am not quite so sure about that, my dear Sir Gilbert," he said.

"You will be presently," Ferringhall answered. "Miss Pellisier sent me to you."

The young man looked wistfully down into the foyer. "Is she here to-night?" he asked quickly. "I did n't see her. We 've just come out of the restaurant."

"Sitting with me near the entrance," Ferringhall answered. "You passed within a few feet of us. Come and have some coffee. Miss Pellisier wants to speak to you."

The invitation was a flattering enough one, but the young man only shook his head. He was obviously disturbed. "Thank you very much," he answered, "but we have to be off at once. That 's so, is n't it, Desmond?" he added, turning to his companion for support.

Desmond — a young American by his accent — answered as desired, but without conviction. "Sure!"

"In that case," Ferringhall remarked, "I will not detain you. By the by, though, you might gratify our curiosity in a certain matter, if you won't think the question impertinent. Miss Pellisier and I are both sure that we know the face of the man to whom you two bowed as you came out of the restaurant — tall, distinguished-looking man, sitting by himself. I wish you 'd tell us who he is!"

The young man shook his head slowly. "I am afraid," he said, "that I cannot tell you. I did not see any one in the restaurant whom I know."

Ferringhall was genuinely surprised. For the moment he scarcely realized the situation. "I mean the man to whom you bowed, you and your friend," he said. "We were only a few yards away."

"It was a mistake," Vlasto answered coolly. "We mistook him for some one else. It was no one whom we know."

Ferringhall was silent for a moment. These young

cubs to lie to him! He turned on his heel. "Sorry I troubled you," he said curtly. "Good night!"

He turned to descend into the crowded foyer and, nodding here and there to acquaintances, began to make his way back to his companions. Suddenly, in the act of descending the steps, he came to a full stop. His chair between the two ladies who were his guests was occupied. He raised his eye-glass and looked once more incredulously in their direction. The man who sat there was the stranger in whom the younger of his two companions had shown so much interest!

CHAPTER II

"IF I had not suddenly remembered, and bowed to you," the girl remarked, "I suppose you would have gone away without a word?"

"I myself," the man answered, with some slight hesitation, "was not quite sure."

"Then you ought to have been — considering how nice I was to you at St. Moritz," the girl declared. "But, then, I think I should have been nice to any one who could teach me to waltz. Do you remember those beautiful clear mornings, with the sunshine blazing down upon us, and the music, and that wonderful black ice? I used to think that little skating-rink, with the mountains all around, was the most perfect place on earth."

"It was very beautiful," he answered. "Did you go this year?"

She shook her head. "My aunt thought that she could n't stand it, so we went to Bordighera instead. By the by," she added, turning to the elderly lady by her side, "you remember Mr. Peters? He was at St. Moritz two years ago."

Mrs. Pellisier bowed a little dubiously. "I am very glad to meet Mr. Peters again," she said.

"My aunt," Grace Pellisier continued, smiling at him, "has been making spasmodic attempts to chaperon me during the last few years. Now, however, she is finally giving it up. She sails for America to-morrow, and is going to leave me to my own devices. No wonder, aunt," she added, turning to her companion, "that you don't remember Mr. Peters at St. Moritz. He was a most mysterious person there."

"I wonder why you thought that?" he asked.

"Well, you were staying in the Kulm," she replied, "but one never saw you in the dining-room or in the lounge. I never saw you in the hotel at all, in fact. You were always out skeeing on the mountains, or skating. And then you disappeared quite suddenly. The mysterious Mr. Peters, they used to call you."

"I was summoned away unexpectedly," he remarked. "For the rest, I did not go there to make acquaintances. I had a private room."

"Superior person," she laughed. "What did you go there for, then?"

"The climate — and to escape from an uncomfortable situation," he answered.

"Do you know that I have seen you once since then?" she asked.

He looked at her quickly. She met his eyes and was suddenly a little afraid of him. Certainly there

was nothing kindly in his expression. "Where?" he asked.

His eyes held hers. There was something compelling in his monosyllable. She would have liked to delay her answer, but she knew that she was powerless to do so. The man's insistence was irresistible.

"I saw you driving from the President's reception in Paris once," she answered. "You were coming out of the Tuileries, and you had a soldier on either side of your carriage. That was why I was so surprised to see — and to recognize — you!"

"It sounds as though I were under arrest," he remarked grimly.

"It looked more like a guard of honour," she answered.

"Then it certainly was not I," he said. "You come often to this place?" he asked, deliberately changing the subject.

"We are here for the first time," she answered. "My aunt does not care much for restaurants, but Sir Gilbert Ferringhall is an old friend, and this is by way of being a farewell dinner."

"Where have you been living during the last two years?" he asked.

"In America some of the time," she answered. "Earning my living at the Empress Theatre since then."

"But you are not American?" he asked.

"No more than you are English," she answered, smiling.

He seemed struck by the openness of her retort. "How do you know that I am not English?" he asked.

"Little things," she answered, "and some inspiration."

"My mother was an Englishwoman," he answered.

"Your mother only! And your name is Peters!"

He smiled. His eyes swept the girl's face. For the first time he realized, perhaps, that she was astonishingly beautiful. "Peters," he said, "is not my name."

"You called yourself that at St.Moritz," she reminded him.

"It suited me to," he answered.

"And now?" she asked.

"It suits me to remain Mr. Peters."

"Even to your friends?" she asked, dropping her voice.

He smiled. "I have none," he answered.

She moved her fan a little, and the words which reached him from the back of it were almost whispered. "You might have," she murmured.

He looked at her deliberately. "I might find people who would call themselves my friends," he said, "but their friendship would scarcely be likely to survive the discovery of who and what I am."

"You do not really believe that," she murmured.

"I do," he answered calmly.

She leaned a little toward him. Her hand flashed out

for a moment only, but in that moment it seemed to gather into a common focus the crowd of loungers by whom they were surrounded. They were suddenly resolved into a type, these women in their elaborate gowns and elaborately coiffured hair, shining with jewels, the whole gallery of their charms at work to its ancient end. The men, too, came under its influence, the men, pleased with their dinner, with themselves, with their womankind, or some one else's womankind, tolerant, fatuous, satisfied with their appeasement of a purely earthly hunger. There was no scorn in the girl's gesture, nor in her looks. Yet the man at her side understood. He understood, too, that she understood, and something new was aroused in him.

"This is the world," she said, "which presses upon us always, intolerably. Is crime itself much worse? Why should you not have friends?"

There was without doubt something new in the man's face; its slow immovability seemed kindled into a certain responsiveness as he met her eyes. "Have you any idea who I am?" he asked abruptly.

"None," she answered. "I only wish to know when you wish to tell me. I ——"

Ferringhall had approached with a murmured word, and the stranger at once rose from his seat. The girl introduced the two men.

"This is Mr. Peters," she said, "Sir Gilbert Ferringhall.

Mr. Peters taught me to waltz at the skating-rink at St. Moritz two years ago. I told you that I was sure we had met before."

"Mr. Peters's face was familiar to me, too," Ferringhall said. "Have n't I also come across you somewhere?"

"Not to my knowledge," was the quiet answer. "I am afraid that I have taken your chair. You must allow me to say good-evening."

"Please don't disturb yourself," Ferringhall said. "The waiter can bring another."

"Don't go," the girl said softly.

Mr. Peters bowed an unmistakable adieu. "You are very good," he said. "As a matter of fact, I had forgotten for a moment that I have an appointment which is already overdue. I am pleased to have met you, Sir Gilbert. Your name is well known to me. I hope that some day," he added, bowing over the girl's fingers, "I may have the pleasure of another skate with you."

"Won't you come to Prince's one afternoon — or come to the theatre and see me?" she asked a little eagerly. "I am quite a successful actress now, you know."

He smiled, and seemed about to ask a question. Then he changed his mind. "You are very kind," he answered. "I shall be very pleased."

He left them after all a little abruptly, and the girl's

eyes followed him intently as he passed along the carpeted way, erect, unbending, the cynosure of many eyes, owing to his height and the uncommon quality of his good looks. Then she turned to Ferringhall.

"Well, did you find out?" she asked.

"Nothing," he answered. "The young cubs actually had the cheek to lie to me. Vlasto told me that their bow was a mistake, they had thought that he was some one else. Still, you have discovered for yourself."

She smiled a little doubtfully. "I have discovered," she said, "that his name is Peters."

The third meeting was scarcely a meeting at all. Every one was a little nervous at the theatre; only a few hours before the performance some one had telephoned from Buckingham Palace that the royal box would be required. The play was a new one, the dialogue difficult. An extra prompter was put on. Grace Pellisier alone remained unmoved. It was not until the curtain went down upon the first act that she even glanced toward the royal party. Then for a moment her inimitable composure seemed to leave her. She barely repressed a start, and a ridiculous pain caught her heart. In the place of honour, and in a uniform ablaze with decorations, sat Mr. Peters! She recovered herself and left the stage. In the wings she met the manager.

"Mr. Felce," she said, "who is the guest in the royal box to-night?"

"The Crown Prince of Bergeland, Miss Pellisier," he answered. "Arrived this morning on a four-days' visit. Fine-looking chap, is n't he?"

"Arrived this morning," she repeated, scarcely conscious of what she said.

"Sure! It was all in the paper. King met him at Victoria. I saw the soldiers as I came up. Say, Miss Pellisier, what a nerve you 've got!" he continued admiringly. "You were the only one who was n't a bit shaky."

"Nevertheless," Miss Pellisier said, "I should like a glass of water."

The manager darted away, and Grace walked slowly to her dressing-room. If this were the Crown Prince of Bergeland, who arrived on Monday morning, who was Mr. Peters, and what was he doing at the Savoy Hotel on Sunday night?

CHAPTER III

GRACE bought a newspaper as she crossed the street from her flat to the theatre two days later. She bought it not because she wanted it, but because the newsboy was persistent. In her dressing-room she chanced to open it while waiting for her maid. The first heading appealed to her. She read it intently — without a smile. It was merely a conventional announcement of the departure of the Crown Prince of Bergeland.

She threw the paper away from her and leaned back in her chair. Her eyes were half closed, her thoughts had played truant. Was it Mr. Peters who had gone, or His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Bergeland? In either case, she was aware of a distinct sense of depression. Her forehead slowly contracted. She was conscious of a frown. What a dull, dull world after all! She was tired of her part, tired of many things. Was she, too, to pass among the slaves — among those to whom the days drifted by without emotions? The machine-like swing of the pendulum — how she hated it!

Her maid brought her a single letter. She took it with listless fingers, yet the very sight of the handwriting

thrilled her. It was bold and large; the envelope seemed scarcely large enough to hold it. It was unfamiliar, and yet she recognized it. She tore it open hastily. The envelope bore the superscription of a neighbouring hotel. The sheet of paper which it enclosed was covered with little more than a single sentence:

THURSDAY.

I should like to see you before I leave England. May I?

JOHN PETERS.

She sprang up and crossed the room to her writing-desk. Her feet seemed to fall upon the air. She drew out a sheet of paper and wrote:

Of course! Come to my flat to-night, 20 Redditch Mansions. I shall be in about 11.30. I send you the key in case you are there first. Wait for me!

She folded the paper about her latch-key, and addressed the envelope to John Peters, Esq., at the Savoy Hotel.

"When you have dressed me for the first act, Murray, you must take this across yourself," she told her maid. "Wait until you are sure that it is properly delivered."

The maid accepted the note and concealed her surprise. Whatever she may have felt or thought, she kept it to herself. They spoke of her mistress as a genius, and genius had the right to do strange things.

The man who called himself John Peters received the note an hour later. He read it in the hall and went slowly to his room. The key seemed to burn his fingers. He threw himself into an easy chair and gazed thoughtfully into the fire. His eyebrows contracted into a frown.

"Have I made a mistake?" he muttered. "Does she understand?"

He hated the thought. Presently, in a saner frame of mind, he cursed himself for it. There was a knock at the door, and Vlasto entered. He looked up inquiringly.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Everything, sir," Vlasto answered. "Your Royal Highness is now sleeping between Calais and Paris."

John Peters nodded. "I shall remain here," he said, "perhaps for a week."

Vlasto looked a little disturbed. "So long, sir?" he ventured to observe.

"Why not?"

"Every day increases the risk," Vlasto affirmed. "Your appearance in the restaurant on Sunday night staggered us all."

"It amused me," John Peters said, "and I was not recognized."

"Ferringhall was curious," Vlasto remarked. "A dangerous man, Ferringhall, too!"

"Ferringhall was squared, anyhow. The young lady who was with him recognized me as John Peters. I skated with her at St. Moritz."

"You mean Grace Pellisier?" Vlasto said slowly.

"Yes."

"You have not forgotten that you were at her theatre on Monday night?"

"She did not recognize me."

"You are very rash, sir," Vlasto said simply. "You know what recognition might mean."

"Ridicule and failure, I suppose," John Peters answered. "Therefore, we must avoid it. Don't be faint-hearted, Vlasto. We play to win, always. Remember — to win! There is no other possibility."

"You have faith in your star, sir," the young man remarked, with a bow.

"No one ever succeeded who had n't," John Peters answered firmly. "Is there any work for us to do to-night?"

"No, sir."

"Any letters from home?"

"None, sir. I see from the papers that there was some rioting in Varia last night."

"Crushed severely, I hope?"

"Six peasants shot, sir, according to the papers. We shall have authentic news to-morrow."

The elder man frowned heavily. "It seems a shame," he said. "Poor fellows!"

"There is no other way, sir," said Vlasto firmly.

John Peters stared into the fire with knitted brows. "It is the same always," he muttered, "the same eternal butchery. Every nation on God's earth has had to climb to freedom on the bodies of her dead children."

"Willingly given, sir," Vlasto murmured.

"Aye! willingly given, but it is death none the less."

Vlasto smiled a little curiously. "There is no one," he reminded his master, "who runs a greater risk than you yourself."

John Peters nodded. The thought made him more complaisant. "I suppose so," he admitted; "in fact, my young friend, my position, when the general flare-up comes, will be just a trifle embarrassing, I am afraid. I must have made a fair number of enemies."

Vlasto looked grave. "It is true, sir," he admitted.

John Peters became instantly more cheerful. "I can think of at least half a dozen," he remarked, "who will want to have a dagger in my body. Well, well, it is something to have deserved so much hatred. Can you keep a secret, Vlasto? A private secret, I mean?"

"Without a doubt, sir."

"I am going to make a call — upon a lady."

"To-night, sir?"

"Now. It is necessary that some one knows where I am. I am going to 20 Redditch Mansions."

The young man's face was disturbed. "I wish you would n't, sir," he said simply.

"Why not?" John Peters asked. "Hergmann and his friends have followed me to Paris, beyond a doubt."

"One can never tell," Vlasto answered. "Hergmann is a clever man, after all. He may have a suspicion."

John Peters laughed softly. "One must trust a little to one's star, Vlasto," he answered, "and I have a fancy that it is my star which is calling me to-night."

Vlasto's eyes were fixed upon the man whom he adored. The change was there for him to see — something which seemed to soften every feature, to smooth out the hard lines, to fill with a strange light the deep, brilliant eyes. Vlasto sighed. It was like the shattering of an ideal to him, this first sign of human weakness in the man of iron.

"I shall wait for you here, sir," he said simply. "I shall not be needed at the embassy."

John Peters nodded. "I shall not be long," he said, "or, again, I may be. One cannot tell."

He rose from his chair and lit a cigarette. The gloom on Vlasto's face attracted his notice. "What is the matter with you, Leopold?" he asked abruptly.

"Presentiments," the young man answered frankly.

"I do not like your errand, sir. I do not recognize you in the character of a midnight adventurer."

John Peters frowned on him. His face was suddenly dark. "Don't talk like a fool, Leopold," he said curtly. "The lady whom I am going to visit is of ourselves. Since when have I aped the cattle, that you should suspect me of a vulgar intrigue?"

Vlasto accepted his rebuke, but his expression was none the less serious. "There are intrigues and intrigues, sir," he said, "and I hate all women. They have bitten the heart out of too many great men's lives."

John Peters walked away with a laugh. But again it seemed to him that the key which he held in his fingers was burning his flesh.

CHAPTER IV

HE FIRST knocked at the door, and receiving no reply he turned the key softly and entered. The room was empty. He took off his hat, unwound the scarf from his neck, and stood looking around him with mingled sensations. This was her room, her home. Had it any message for him, he wondered, anything to tell him that he did not know concerning her?

There were two sitting-rooms, divided by an arch of whitewood, but uncurtained, and open to each other. In the farther one a small, round dining-table was covered with a table-cloth, as though for some meal; the other apartment, in which he stood, was evidently used purely as a sitting-room. There were a piano, some easy chairs, a small table, with a vase of flowers, and a pile of reviews and newspapers. A fire burned in the grate, and the mantelpiece was laden with photographs, mostly of women. He looked in vain for any signs of marked individuality in the room. He glanced at the books — a volume of Rossetti's poems, Pater's "Imaginary Portraits," a New York paper, and the Rubaiyat, lay side by side. Little was to be learned from them. They showed, indeed, few

signs of use — the freak of a *poseuse*, perhaps. The newspaper was doubled down in a certain place; the sight of a familiar name attracted him, and he took it up. It was an article which he had read once or twice lately. It was entitled, "The Most Decadent Monarchy in Europe," and it referred to Bergeland.

With a faint smile upon his lips, he took it to the fireplace and read it through once more, word for word. He read of the licentious life, lived by king and crown prince alike, which made the court of this elderly monarch the most dissolute spot in Europe, a place to be avoided by all decent people. He read of unconstitutional taxation, of a corrupt ministry, of a people goaded to the very point of rebellion. When he had finished he looked up, to find her standing before him and her maid gliding into the farther apartment.

"You are amusing yourself, I trust?" she asked, as she removed the hatpins from her hat.

He smiled grimly as he threw the paper away, but he said nothing. He was looking at her.

"At least," she continued, "you should be interested."

He frowned suddenly, and his eyes flashed into hers. "Why?" he demanded.

"I saw you at the theatre the other evening, Mr. John Peters," she remarked, unfolding her scarf and holding it out to her maid. "Do sit down, won't you? You look

too big for the room, standing up. Bring that easy chair up to the fire."

"You were mistaken," he said.

"As you will," she answered indifferently. "I will be mistaken if you like. It is all the same to me so long as you are here."

He looked steadily across at her. What manner of woman was this, who made him welcome under such circumstances? She was sitting opposite to him now, her head resting upon her slim, ringless fingers, her eyes unflinchingly meeting his. The unrelieved black of her simply-made gown, and her colourless cheeks, gave her to some extent an air of physical frailty; yet even as he watched, the colour slowly mantled her dusky skin, her eyes softened, and the mouth, which seemed to him the most beautiful he had ever seen, was parted in a glorious, an understanding, smile.

"Am I very forward?" she laughed. "But we have passed the days of children, you and I. We belong to the race of those who understand."

He nodded, and turning his head, pointed to the paper. "You have read that," he said. "You believe that you recognized me at the theatre, and yet you asked me here to-night."

"Certainly," she answered, "it was the man in whom I was interested — not his sins."

"That puzzles me," he admitted. "I should have thought that a man and his sins were one."

She laughed softly. "Not by any manner of means," she declared. "I have known the most charming people in the world who have done the most shocking things. Half the unhappiness in the world comes from this stupid inability to dissociate the two. Let us have some supper," she broke off abruptly. "Murray, ring the bell and have up some cold things and some wine. I am starving. Excuse me."

She pushed some cigarettes toward him, and vanished into the inner room, reappearing in a few minutes in a plain gown of some deep-blue material. She had pushed her hair back from her head, and she seemed to him somehow to have grown younger. A waiter brought in a tray.

"You must have something with me," she insisted. "I hope you are not in a hurry. Remember, this is when my few hours' absolute freedom commences. All day long I have the thought of my work before me. Now it is over — done with for the time. I suppose it seems very unwholesome to you, this turning night into day. But what can one do?"

She played the hostess charmingly, and afterward, as they passed back into the smaller room, she drew him gently toward the window. She held a cigarette between

her fingers, the smoke of which curled softly upward. "One of the privileges of living so high up," she remarked, "is that one need never draw one's blinds. I like a night view, don't you? It is so mysterious."

"You are an impressionist," he remarked.

"In everything, in sensations as well as art," she admitted. "There is nothing to be learned from the obvious. Come and talk to me as you did at St. Moritz."

"You have not forgotten?" he asked.

"I never forget," she answered. "You taught me to waltz, and in the intervals we talked of the greater things. You had a science of life — a whole set of theories of your own. Has time destroyed them?"

He pointed to the newspaper. "What do you think?" he asked.

She hesitated for a moment. "You mean to admit, then, that you are ——"

He glanced around the room. "I trust you with more than my life," he answered. "I am John Valentine Peters, Crown Prince of Bergeland."

She pointed back to the paper. "And those stories?"

He looked out into the night. "Ah!" he said softly, "those stories!"

"You have read them?" she asked.

"Every line of them," he answered, "and many more as bad. I have a file of the papers at home in my room."

She was silent for several moments. He wondered whether it was to give him an opportunity to explain. She asked no questions. The burden of further speech, however, she laid upon him.

"You believe them?" he asked at length.

"I believe you," she answered calmly. "What you tell me is sufficient."

"And I have told you nothing," he remarked.

"I have asked no questions," she reminded him.

"The stories," he said slowly, "are, in the main, true of the person of whom they are written."

"And you are the Prince of Bergeland?"

"I am," he answered.

He saw a shadow flit across her face, a shadow that was like the passing of some pain. He leaned toward her. "Don't worry about me," he said softly. "I am not worth it. We are degenerate, all of us — we of the house of Bergeland, you know. If I dared say so much to you, I would say this: If you have a little trust in me, keep it."

She smiled at him. "That," she answered, "is easy. The only Prince of Bergeland whom I know is a different person."

"You honour me," he said quietly. "I shall not forget it. I shall never forget it. Don't you think that we have talked enough now of my unworthy self? I want you to tell me how it is that I find you here alone — and about

your profession. You seemed to me in St. Moritz a very different sort of person."

"In what way?" she asked him.

"Well, for one thing you were surrounded with friends and relations," he answered. "Some of them were quite formidable, too. I cannot imagine how you managed to break loose from such an environment."

She laughed quietly. "It was just that," she said, "which has made an adventuress of me. No girl can live her own life to-day who is situated as I was situated. I broke loose because I had to. I was n't particularly attracted by the stage — I am not now, but it was the only profession which would give me the freedom I desired. That is why I chose it — and you can imagine the battle I had."

He nodded. "You have been successful," he remarked.

"Not so successful as you imagine," she answered. "I am really rather an indifferent actress, but I work hard. I had to make some sort of a show to justify myself."

"And you are contented with your life?" he asked.

She raised her eyebrows a little. "Contented! I pray that I may never be that," she answered. "I am a little freer, that is all, and I have broken away from a life which was little less than slavery."

"You have a career," he said, half to himself.

She nodded. "But remember," she begged, "that I

chose my career as a means of escape. My career did not choose me. That is where I come to grief. I have learned a good deal, but the person who has to learn is already hopeless. I know the truth myself quite well. I have not in me the making of a great actress."

"And yet," he said, "I do not believe that mediocrity in anything would ever satisfy you. If you are as sure as you say, you should leave the stage."

She smiled. "No," she said, "that is not necessary. I have no illusions, you see; so I court no disappointments. But what things in life are worth having must come to me — outside of my profession."

She spoke quite calmly. She seemed almost prepared for the obvious question. "The great things in life," she answered, "I suppose they mean something different to all of us."

"To you?" he demanded.

"I do not seek them," she answered. "I pray that they will come. I only know that I have the heart-longing for them. The place is there waiting, but I do not know what they will be." She turned away from the window and looked steadily into his face. "I wonder," she said, "what they are for you!"

He pointed to the paper. "After that," he said, "you do me honour when you suggest that I am capable of them."

"Weeds and flowers grow together," she answered. "Oh! you are capable of great things if you tried. There is no doubt of that."

"Do you know anything of the history of my country?" he asked her.

"A little," she answered.

"Do you believe," he asked, "that any man God ever made could wipe out from the hearts of the people the shameful misrule of the last twenty years?"

"It will be your task," she answered; "a heavy one, no doubt."

She looked toward the newspaper, and he understood. In that momentary silence the attention of both of them was suddenly diverted. They looked toward the door. A stealthy footstep had halted outside. They waited for a knock. None came. Grace moved swiftly across the room, and opening the door, looked out. The corridor was empty. She came back into the room with a frown upon her forehead.

"I distinctly heard some one outside," she remarked.

"So did I," he assented, stepping to the door. "It sounded like some one walking on tiptoe."

"I wonder who can be spying upon me," she murmured perplexedly. "The electric lights are all lower than usual, too."

"In any case," he said, "I had better be going."

"We have only just begun to talk," she said reluctantly.

He glanced toward the clock, and took up his hat and coat in earnest. "I shall be here to-morrow night," he said. "May I come in?"

"Of course," she answered. "Listen again a moment."

She was looking out once more into the dimly lit passage. "I am actually nervous," she whispered. "I hate unexplained noises."

He smiled reassuringly, but he knew very well that, with his knowledge, her nervousness would soon have become downright fear. He knew what she probably did not, that he went with a price upon his head. While he shook hands with her, the fingers of his left hand closed over something in his overcoat pocket that was hard and cold.

"The lift is just round the corner," she whispered softly. "Till to-morrow night! I am going to lock my door quickly."

She stepped back, and he heard the lock turn in the door. For a moment he stood upright in the middle of the corridor, looking up and down, and listening intently. Then he began to make his way very cautiously toward the lift.

CHAPTER V

GRACE heard her visitor announce himself with a sudden start, which almost resembled fear. "Sir William Wilson!" she exclaimed, half incredulously. "Won't you sit down?"

"You are very kind," he answered. "If I may, I will take this easy chair."

He made himself comfortable in a leisurely fashion, crossing his legs, and smiling benevolently at her. Certainly no man in the world could have seemed less likely to inspire the sentiment of fear. He was somewhat short, and inclined toward corpulence; he had gray whiskers and beard, though his upper lip was clean shaven; he was dressed in a respectable frock-coat suit, on the waistcoat of which reposed a heavy gold chain. He looked exactly what he was — a prosperous, middle-aged shopkeeper who, his prosperity having touched the millions, was spoken of everywhere as a merchant prince.

"My dear Miss Pellisier," he said, smiling reassuringly upon her, "I have not come here to take up much of your time, or to ask of you anything very terrible. You are, I

know, a member of the society of which I have the honour to be president, but you are a member of only the outside circle, what we call the 'theorists,' so our claim upon you is not a very exacting one. Still, there are certain small ways in which it chances just now that you can be of service to us. Don't think me impertinent, please, or curious. I speak on behalf of larger than personal interests. You had a visitor last night."

Grace started slightly. "Yes," she answered hesitatingly; "it was a Mr. John Peters."

"The *nom de voyage*, as I dare say you are aware," he continued, "of John Valentine Peters, Crown Prince of Bergeland."

She bowed her head. "I met him two years ago at St. Moritz," she admitted. "He always called himself Mr. John Peters. It scarcely seems possible to me, even now, that he can be the man of whom all these terrible things are said."

"It is the same man," Sir William declared cheerfully, "the same man, beyond the shadow of a doubt. He is one of the most pestilent rogues in Europe, and has found his way most worthily, I am bound to admit, into a little book we keep, on the cover of which is inscribed, 'Enemies of the People.' It is better for any man, as you may have heard, that he does not find his name written inside that book."

"Why have you come here to talk to me about him?" she asked.

"We feel a certain interest in his movements," Sir William continued, pressing the tips of his fingers gently against each other. "For instance, we should like to know whether he is coming to see you again to-night."

"Yes," Grace answered, with a catch in her breath.

"After the performance?"

"Yes."

Sir William seemed pleased. "Well," he said, "we have a small, a very small commission for you. We should like you to keep him here until half-past one, and to see that he departs as nearly as possible at that time."

"Why?" Grace asked breathlessly.

"There are certain people," Sir William declared, "who desire a little conversation with him."

"Is that all?" she demanded.

"It is all that concerns you," Sir William answered, with the first note of sternness in his voice. Before she could frame another question, he had taken his leave and was gone.

John Peters detected almost at once that something had happened, that there was some change in her attitude toward him. He had taken care this time to arrive later

than she, and had found her sitting in an easy chair drawn up to the fire, reading again the chronicle of his iniquities. She had not changed her gown, and her hat lay on the sofa where she had thrown it. When he entered she started, and her expression puzzled him. Was it his fancy, or was there fear shining out of the dark, somewhat distended eyes which met his.

"You were expecting me, I hope?" he asked, bending over her hand. "You had not forgotten?"

"No," she answered, "I had not forgotten, but I am sorry that you have come. I was hoping that you might have been called away."

"This," he remarked, drawing a chair up near hers, "requires an explanation. I see that you have been reading again that eternal story of my misdeeds. Why?"

"Because," she answered steadily, "I am trying to reconcile the two men, and I can't. I ask myself what my friend, John Peters, can possibly have to do with — that scoundrel," she added, pointing to the paper. "I ask myself whether I am mad, that I permit a man like that to be here with me — alone."

"You permit me to be here," he said gently, "because you trust me."

"Then either my trust is misplaced," she declared, "or you are not Valentine, Prince of Bergeland, or those stories are lies."

"Your trust," he answered, "is not misplaced. That is all that I can tell you."

"You drank wine with me last night," she said. "Is it true that you have drunk champagne out of the slipper of a dancing girl?"

He smiled faintly. "I can't seem to recall it," he admitted. "Let us put that down to a stretch of the reporter's imagination."

She pointed eagerly to the newspaper. "The whole report," she exclaimed, "is perhaps exaggerated?"

He shook his head. "Not so very much, I believe. On the whole, I believe it is somewhere near the truth."

She was silent for a moment. Then she turned toward the table. "Very well," she said, "let us have supper."

He took his place, looking at her a little curiously. "Supposing," he said, "I had been able to deny it?"

"In that case," she said, "I should have sent you away this minute."

"You puzzle me," he declared, filling her glass with wine. "One would imagine that it is a privilege to remain, not to be sent away."

"To-morrow," she answered, "you may think differently. Now talk to me. Tell me of some of your adventures — not the very worst ones, of course. You must have met with some very amusing people in your wanderings."

He smiled. "I meet all sorts," he said, "but they are seldom amusing. I would sooner that we imagined ourselves back at St. Moritz again, and talked as we did then."

"Those days are finished," she answered. "I do not wish to be reminded of them."

"They may come again," he said softly.

"They can never come again," she replied. "They belonged to Mr. John Peters and to me. Now there is a third party who has intervened — and it is finished!"

"A third party?"

"Yes," she answered, "John Valentine, Prince of Bergeland."

They ate and drank almost in silence. Then, as they were finishing, he leaned across the table to her.

"Listen," he said, "it is true that I am John Peters, and it is true that I am John Valentine, Prince of Bergeland. But I will say this to you, and it is more than I have said to any other person on earth: There are a hundred gutter journalists ready to throw mud at the man who plays the fool, and sometimes they miss the mark. Look at me, Grace."

She obeyed him, half unwillingly as it seemed to him.

"I have never drunk wine out of the slipper of a dancing girl. I do not love dancing girls. I have never been drunk in my life. I have thought oftener, and with more

pleasure, of a fortnight I spent in St. Moritz two years ago than of any other fortnight before or since."

"If I could only believe you," she murmured, her eyes still intently fixed on his.

"It is always easy," he answered, "to recognize the truth."

She sighed, and glanced toward the clock. Its hands were pointing to one. She held out both her hands.

"I am going to try to believe in you," she said, "and because of that I am going to send you away this moment. Don't ask me any questions. Light that cigarette and go!"

"Is n't this a little sudden?" he remonstrated.

"Never mind that. It is for your own sake I am sending you away. Some day I may explain, but not now!"

"I may come again?"

"Some day, but I will write. Please!" She held the door open.

The obvious earnestness of her manner impressed him. He raised her hand to his lips, and stepped out into the dimly lit corridor.

Grace closed the door, and stood for a moment with her hand to her heart. Then she moved over to the window and threw it open, feeling the need of fresh air. Exactly opposite to her was the clock of St. Martin's in the Fields,

and as she stood there it chimed the half-hour. She listened, gazing through the darkness, with distended eyes, at the illuminated dial. Half-past one! She sprang to the mantelpiece, and a sudden horror seized her. The little white marble clock had stopped! She had sent him out at exactly the hour she had been told!

CHAPTER VI

NO MAN upon the earth had a larger share of courage than the man who called himself John Peters; yet he walked along that dimly lit corridor with tense nerves and fast-beating heart. The carpet was of a deep red material, the walls were painted the same colour, and the electric lights were shaded with red globes. Only two or three were burning throughout the whole length of the corridor, and the general effect was one of warm and tremulous darkness. He came to within a few yards of the open space where the lift was. On his left the doors continued, on his right there was an abrupt corner, where the corridor ended and the open space around the lift began. As he neared it he kept close to the right and began to whistle softly, but when he was about a yard away, he took a swift step to the left, facing half round, so as to meet any attack from the corner. His movement amounted to inspiration. Simultaneously the few remaining lights in the corridor went out, something sprang from the corner, something whistled close to his ear with a soft, sickly swish, the hissing noise of pliant metal cutting the empty air. John Peters leaped to one side, sprang

round, and caught his assailant, who was partly overbalanced, around the neck. The weapon, whatever it was, dropped to the floor. With his left hand, John Peters felt for the electric-light knob on the wall, found it, and turned on the light. So far the silence was almost unbroken, except for the hoarse breathing of the half-choked man.

"For God's sake, not so tight," he moaned.

John Peters relaxed his grip a little. The man was a baby in his arms, slim, pale, unmuscular. He was clad in dress trousers and shirt; the remains of an evening tie hung down from his crushed collar. As an unarmed adversary he was contemptible. John Peters picked up the weapon which lay upon the floor, and put it in his pocket. Then he dragged his prisoner to his feet. There were still no signs of life anywhere about. Suddenly, however, they heard the clatter of the lift coming up. They moved instinctively out of sight along the corridor.

"Look here," John Peters whispered, "if any one gets out on this floor and you try to escape, I shall give you in charge. You understand?"

The man nodded. He was still breathing heavily.

"Pull yourself together," his captor continued, "try to be talking to me naturally, if any one comes by."

Another second's waiting. The lift went up to the top floor and descended again to the basement. Once

more silence. Both men were relieved, though the face of John Peters remained impassive. Very gently his hand once more rested upon the other's shoulder, close to his neck. The man shuddered. Already he seemed to feel the touch of those cruel fingers.

"Would you like," John Peters asked softly, "to save your life?"

The man's eyes seemed to recede into his head. John Peters looked at him in contempt. He was a poor pawn in the great game.

"You don't mean to kill me," he muttered; "you dare n't!"

John Peters laughed almost inaudibly, but it was still a laugh. The man who heard it shuddered. "Why not? It is in self-defence. My fingers upon your throat for thirty seconds would do it. It is n't a pleasant death, either. Let me repeat my question: Would you care to save your life?"

"Yes," the man answered, with trembling lips.

"Naturally," John Peters whispered; "you are a coward, and cowards are afraid to die. I will let you go unharmed if you will take me now, this instant, to those who sent you out to kill me."

"Take you — to them?" the man faltered.

"Exactly," John Peters answered. "You must make up your mind quickly, too. We may be disturbed at any

moment. These people are not all gone to bed yet, and they may have visitors."

The man seemed bewildered. The condition seemed to him amazing. Take him to them! Why, it was to transform failure into success.

"Alone?" he asked hoarsely.

"Certainly," John Peters assented.

The man nodded. "Very well," he said, "I will do it."

"If you attempt to escape," John Peters began sternly, "I shall give you up to the first policeman we see."

The man, who was recovering his confidence, laughed shortly. "There will be no policeman nor any chance of escape. The others are close here." He glanced along the corridor, and laid his fingers upon his captor's arm.

"Do you mean," John Peters asked, "that they are in this building?"

"In this building, upon this floor," the man answered. "I will keep my word. I will take you to them if you like."

John Peters nodded slowly. "So much the better," he said. "The fates played into your hands to-night with a vengeance. Pity they chose such a bungler as you, my friend. The affair might have been all nicely arranged by now."

The man felt his throat. "We drew lots," he said hoarsely. "I wish it had been some one else! I think that I shall never be able to swallow again. Come."

Softly they retraced their steps along the corridor. John Peters was thinking with knitted brows. It was a coincidence, this — the same building, the same floor. He glanced at the numbers. They were passing them one by one. They were getting to the end of the corridor. Then this strong man, who had faced his danger without flinching, and who was preparing to face even greater dangers, suddenly stopped short. His guide looked at him in amazement. He felt a sudden grip upon his shoulder which reminded him unpleasantly of the burning pain upon his throat. The face of John Peters, too, was changed. He was pale, the perspiration had broken out upon his forehead. The splendid impassivity of his features was gone. His mouth was twitching nervously; his eyes held a new thing, the thing called fear. The weakling who was in his clutch felt a sudden relief. After all, this man was human. His terror began to diminish.

"You are going to back out," he said. "I thought you would."

John Peters ignored his gibe; it is doubtful whether he even heard it. There was something else in his mind; more virulent poison was in his brain. "Where are you taking me?" he demanded hoarsely. "What is the number of the room?"

His guide frowned. "We shall be there directly," he answered. "It is just ahead."

John Peters set his teeth tightly together, and muttered things to himself. The attempt upon his life seemed to him now a small thing. Was this hideous thought of his possible? He thought of his long evening with her; in those few agonized seconds he realized how near to happiness he had come, how sweet a thing had found its way into his life. Was he to lose it already? Was she nothing but a hypocrite, an underground schemer, a Delilah who had planned to lure him into this danger? He shivered all over, and the man at his side was anxious indeed. He was sure now that he should never get him into the room. He expected every moment to find himself alone, and John Peters on his way to the lift.

"Tell me the number of the room," John Peters hissed into his ear, and this time his guide did not dare to hesitate.

"Just in front — on the right — Number 20. Are you coming on?"

John Peters did not answer for a moment. He drew himself up, and every muscle in his body seemed, for a moment, straining with a sort of physical effort, coexistent with the greater struggle which was tearing his heart. Out they came, dreams and hopes and sentiments, of sudden enough growth, forced into a wonderful vitality by the man's years of loneliness and self-repression. They were seconds only which passed, yet it was a weighty chapter

of his life. The woman he loved had sent him to his death. Worse than that, she had deliberately sought him out, deliberately planned this assault, first upon his heart, then upon his life. An indifferent actress she had called herself! John Peters knew better. Never a false note, never a weak second! And he was to have been her victim!

They had stopped in front of Number 20, the door through which he had issued only a few minutes ago with the feeling of a man who has passed through the long tunnels of life, and emerged into the valley of flowers and sunshine. A sudden storm of anger shook him — anger against himself and fate and life. His pride leaped up in arms, all his indomitable faith in his destiny burned once more in his blood. His guide, looking up into his face, did not doubt now that he would enter the room.

"It is here," he said simply.

"Go first," John Peters said, slipping his hand into his overcoat pocket. "Remember that I am close behind. Say nothing. Leave that to me."

CHAPTER VII

JOHN PETERS stood there with his back against the door, and the hand which grasped his revolver stretched out into the room. Pitiless as fate itself seemed the eyes which calmly yet alertly took stock of its three occupants. Yet neither his expression nor his tone was in the least threatening.

"You must pardon me," he begged, "if my entrance seems a little melodramatic. One has to make sure, and the attitude of the young gentleman who brought me was quite alarming. If you move your hand, sir, one inch nearer that drawer, I shall put a bullet through it. Back, please. Thanks! I shall not seem boastful, I hope, if I remind you that I am supposed to be almost the best shot with a revolver in Europe."

All the time his eyes were taking stock of them — two men and Grace. One was short and dark, with black moustache and beard, and restless eyes; the other was older, with shrewd, benevolent face, and deep-set eyes. Both were dressed in faultless evening clothes; both were apparently men of nerve, for they faced the situation unflinchingly. And behind them stood Grace,

now as pale as death, with something miserably pathetic in her drawn features, and a half-defiant light in her eyes, which seemed to challenge his. But he never looked at her.

"I have come," John Peters continued, "to have a little conversation with you. It seems very possible that we might find interesting things to discuss. Only, I am not comfortable like this, and my attitude is perhaps open to misconstruction. Have you any objection to placing yourselves according to a little idea of my own?"

The elder of the two men shrugged his shoulders. "We are entirely at your disposal, sir," he said. "Let us know in what way we can meet your wishes."

"Our young friend here," John Peters continued pleasantly, "will place three chairs there" — he pointed — "a little farther apart, please. That will do admirably. The lady" — he looked at her for the first time, unflinchingly — "will be so good as to take that easy chair, a little farther off." His eyes held hers, and she obeyed, as did the others.

The elder man held out his hand toward a box of cigarettes. "Have we your permission to smoke?" he asked pleasantly. "I can recommend these cigarettes."

"They are excellent," John Peters agreed. "I have

been privileged to try them myself. By all means, smoke — and now you will not mind a few questions?"

"Certainly not," the man declared; "so long as you do not insist upon answers."

"Oh! I dare say we shall not quarrel about that," John Peters said, quietly. "In the first place, I should like to know how to address you."

"Certainly," was the courteous reply. "Miss Pellisier I think you already know. The young gentleman whose acquaintance you made in the corridor, calls himself, I believe, Monsieur Defarge. Our friend on my left here is Mr. St. Dalmas. My own name is Sir William Wilson. We have the pleasure, I believe, of addressing — Mr. John Peters?"

John Peters nodded. "Sometimes known as John Valentine, Duke of Sayon, Prince of Bergeland," he added drily. "Now, Sir William, I should like to know why you four people dislike me so much that you thought it advisable to dispense with my presence upon the earth. A little personal feeling I might have understood, but you go too far."

Sir William shook his head slowly. "My dear Prince," he said, "or Mr. Peters, if you prefer, you misapprehend the situation entirely. Personally, I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before, and I can assure you that I have nothing whatever against you. None of us have

"Now, Sir William, I should like to know why you four people dislike me so much." [*Page* 58

anything against you. It is the Crown Prince of Bergeland whom we should like to remove, in the interests of a great many people."

"You don't like my manner of life, I suppose?" John Peters remarked.

Sir William shook his head. "We dislike it exceedingly," he said. "To tell you the truth, it is impossible for us to contemplate with equanimity your accession to the throne of your country."

"I sympathize with you — to some extent," John Peters remarked. "I feel that I should make a thoroughly bad king. But when you say 'we,' you make me wonder whom you represent. Attempts of this sort have been made before to expedite my departure from this world, but I have always been able to trace their source. I must admit that you puzzle me completely. I see apparently an Englishman, a Frenchman, a Bergian — I take it that Mr. Defarge is of my own country — and a young American lady. What does it matter to you whether my country is well or ill ruled?"

"We are philanthropists, my dear sir," Sir William declared, lighting another cigarette. "We might be compared to a gardener, wandering about a great garden with a pruning knife in his hands. He lops a bough here, a blossom there, and the world — the garden I mean, is the healthier for it."

John Peters nodded sympathetically. "I see," he said. "The idea is excellent. I should like to understand your point of view more clearly, however. At present I am harmless enough. I do not rule over anybody or anything. On the other hand, my uncle, who is King of Bergeland to-day, is perhaps as bad a king as ever sat upon a throne. He indulges in all the vices which are popularly attributed to me; he robs the revenues in a dozen different ways; he shows not the slightest interest in his people, and some of his private commercial undertakings, entered upon to provide more funds for his numerous extravagances, have become the scandal of Europe. Now I should have thought that any one seeking to relieve the earth of an undesirable ——"

Sir William interrupted with a little wave of his hand. He leaned forward in his chair confidentially. "I see your point of view, my dear sir," he said, "and I can assure you that I appreciate it, but, to tell you the truth, we are all amateurs at this sort of thing, as you yourself have had an opportunity to find out. We carry out our little affairs ourselves, and we have not had much experience. You can understand, I dare say, that it is much easier to get rid of a prince, especially when he travels a good deal incognito, than a king."

John Peters looked across the room, looked into the eyes of the woman who had made the world a different

place for him. "And the lady who acts as your decoy," he asked calmly, "is she also an amateur?"

She started as though some one had stabbed her, and a rush of colour burned her cheeks. The look which flashed for a moment across to him hurt, but his eyes never faltered.

"Miss Pellisier is more of an amateur than any of us, perhaps," Sir William said.

"She is certainly the greatest artist," John Peters answered, "but let that go. I have heard what you have to say. Let me add a few remarks. Supposing your attempt to-night had been successful. Do you know who would have succeeded to the throne of Bergeland on my uncle's death?"

"One of your two cousins, sir," St. Dalmas answered, "Count Emil or the Duke of Latoria."

"Exactly," John Peters agreed. "I know them both well, and I can assure you that although they may be cleverer at concealing their delinquencies, they are not a scrap better than I am. I believe that Emil is really worse."

"They are not so brazen, at least," St. Dalmas declared. "They have not made all Europe ring with their follies."

"People do talk so," John Peters remarked, with a sigh, "but at any rate you can take my word for it that those young men are no better than I am. That is where

I think that your system of indiscriminate slaughter has its weak points. I can confidently assure you that Bergeland would be just as ill-governed by any other member of my house."

"Your death," Sir William remarked, "might serve as a warning to these other young men."

John Peters shook his head. "If it is really the good of my country which you seek, I wonder you do not try to make use of other means."

The young man, who had not yet spoken since he had brought John Peters into the room, now leaned a little forward in his chair. "What other means," he asked, "are open to us?"

"There," John Peters remarked, "you open up a great subject. Still, you have history to refer to. What has generally happened in countries whose people were worthy, but whose ruling race became degenerate?"

"Revolution," the young man answered, grimly.

"Precisely," John Peters assented. "Why not revolt against us?"

"Because, as you know very well," the young man answered, "Germany would interfere at once. The Kaiser does not like republics on his frontier."

"Well, I am not going to show you how to do it," John Peters remarked. "If I were not the Crown Prince of Bergeland, however, I fancy I could give you a few hints."

"You will permit me to say," Sir William remarked, "that you are not in the least the sort of young man I expected to find you."

"That may or may not be a compliment," John Peters answered. "I can at least, however, go so far on my own account as to say that you are none of you in the least like the bloodthirsty band I expected to find at the back of my young assailant here. None the less dangerous, I dare say," he added, smiling, "because your methods are modern. Frankly, I do not seem to have found out much about you."

Sir William shrugged his shoulders. "I considered," he remarked, "that we had been most frank."

"Up to a certain point, yes," John Peters admitted; "but what are you? Who are you? A society, or just one or two cranks?"

Sir William was silent for several moments. He kept his eyes fixed upon John Peters, and the expression upon his face during those few seconds underwent a remarkable change. All its benevolence, its somewhat middle-class respectability, seemed to vanish. His eyes grew brighter and keener. It was the face now of a dangerous man.

"Prince," he said, "you are not the sort of person I expected to find you. You have humour, and you have pluck. It has pleased you to turn this affair into a sort of comedy, and we have been content to fall in with your

whim. But the time has come for us to speak seriously. What was your object in making Defarge bring you here? We have been your judges, and we have condemned you to die. The first skirmish has ended in your favour. You have a certain measure of advantage for the moment. It cannot alter the end, but it would be as well for us to understand one another. How do you intend to use that advantage? What is to be the end of this interview?"

"Terms," John Peters answered, "if you will accept them."

"Well?"

"Give me six months' safety. I am tired of dodging assassins. For six months' safety, I leave you here undisturbed and unquestioned."

"We grant you that six months," Sir William answered, "provided only that your uncle — who, I believe, is in excellent health — lives so long. You see, we do not in any case intend to allow you to ascend the throne of Bergeland."

John Peters nodded. Then he rose slowly to his feet. "Let it be so," he answered. "I accept. For six months, then, we are free of one another. At the end of that time, war if you like."

"War it must be," Sir William said gravely.

John Peters rose and bowed indifferently. Then, for a moment, his eyes travelled over the heads of the three men,

to where Grace still sat in the easy chair, with her face partly averted. It seemed so short a time since they two had stood together before the window, and life had suddenly seemed filled with a rare and unexpected sweetness. It was the same room, almost the same spot. A sudden wave of anger swept up in the man.

"War, by all means," he declared, almost fiercely. "The greatest causes can be debased by false methods. The world will never be set free by the assassin's knife or the throwing of bombs."

CHAPTER VIII

IN a small but lofty writing-chamber leading out of a great library, an elderly gentleman in a dark morning-suit, with a large pink rose in his buttonhole, stood looking out of the window. He had a gray beard, gray hair parted in the centre, a high forehead, and long, powerfully shaped features. He was smoking a cigar, and apparently looking out across the park, but he turned continually toward the door, as though expecting some one. It was opened at last by a man in dark livery, who stood at one side and respectfully announced a visitor:

"His Royal Highness the Prince of Bergeland!"

The man who called himself John Peters strolled in, and after a formal bow, shook hands with his uncle. "Hope you 're well, sir," he said.

The king frowned. "I am well enough," he said, "but you — if all the accounts of your doings are true — you ought to have one foot in the grave."

"You should n't believe all you see in the papers, sir," the young man answered carelessly. "I never look at them myself."

"It 's a pity that you don't," the king answered. "You

might learn to be a little more careful. Your doings are becoming perfectly scandalous. What 's this about Mademoiselle Cara and the duchess's diamonds?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "So the journalists got hold of that, did they?" he remarked. "Upon my word, nothing seems sacred from them nowadays."

The king stood up and moved back toward the window. The square outside was crowded with passers-by, for the palace stood in an enclosure fronting a great public thoroughfare. He called to the prince to stand by his side. "You see all those people," he said gravely; "my subjects, yours some day. Ten years ago, such a thing as a republican was unknown in this city. To-day, every third man who passes there is a revolutionist."

The prince was interested. He looked out thoughtfully upon the constant stream of people. "Well," he said, "I for one don't blame them. If I had to pay to support a royal house, I should be a revolutionist myself."

The king frowned heavily. "This is not a joking matter," he said. "There is a power growing up right under our eyes here which threatens our very existence. There is more underneath it all, too; I suspect, a deliberate plot against the monarchy. Bernhardt says little, but I know that he is anxious."

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. "We must take our chances, I suppose," he said.

"Rubbish!" the king exclaimed emphatically. "I sent for you because I want you to understand that I consider you largely responsible for what is going on."

John Peters looked at him keenly. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Simply this," his uncle continued. "The capital rings with your name and the reports of your scandalous doings. All this is what those people work upon. They keep an account of your extravagances, of your mad doings in every city you enter. They ask one another whether they are to pay for them. They dare to put these things into print."

"One must amuse oneself," the prince answered. "You yourself, my dear uncle ——"

"That will do," the king said sharply. "At any rate, I do not flaunt my weaknesses. So far as I know, in this country you lead a decent life. The moment you leave it, you seem to lose your head altogether. I sent for you because I am tired of warnings. I want you to understand this: There is a strong party growing up throughout the country that does not intend to be ruled by a scoundrel. You may even succeed, if you go on, in bringing about a revolution."

The prince was silent for a moment. "Yes," he said

thoughtfully, "I suppose I am unpopular here. But a revolution — it always needs a genius to bring about that."

"The genius may appear," the king said drily. "The man and the moment generally arrive together. There is only one thing you can do to restore your popularity."

"And that?"

"Marry."

John Peters smiled. "Whom? Hergmann's daughter? — he is the head of the People's party, is n't he? It would be a diplomatic alliance."

"Don't be a fool, John. You must marry either a German or an English princess."

John Peters shook his head. "Impossible," he declared. "I have acquired your wonderful taste as regards the sex. To save my throne, I could n't marry a woman with thick ankles."

"You are a downright fool this morning, John," the king declared angrily. "I request that you abandon this tone once and for all."

"All right," John Peters answered, "but I won't marry the Princess Ida!"

The king laughed softly. "It was n't proposed that you should," he answered. "Bernhardt and I will go into the matter in a day or two. I wanted to warn you. And I want you also to understand this: I will not have you going

about the city unattended and incognito. It is undignified, and likely to do you harm."

"Anything else?" the young man inquired, with the air of a martyr.

"There were several more things, but I have forgotten them," the king answered. "I am tired to-day."

John Peters regarded him anxiously. "You are feeling quite well, sir, I hope?" he inquired.

"There 's nothing the matter," the king answered sharply. "You need n't worry."

"I don't want to have to," the prince answered. "The fact of it is, your health and mine are rather intimately connected just now."

"What do you mean?" the king asked. "Intimately connected, eh?"

The prince nodded. "Fellow tried to assassinate me in London last week," he remarked. "I came off best, and we made terms. His employers, whoever they were, give me six months' grace before they try again, provided you live for the six months."

The king regarded his nephew in angry amazement. "Is this a joke, sir?" he demanded.

"It was no joke for me," John Peters answered grimly. "It happened exactly as I say."

"But where were you? There was nothing about it in the papers."

John Peters sighed. "I 'm afraid I must confess to being alone — and unattended," he admitted. "I had been calling upon a lady. We won't say anything more about it, as it is rather a painful subject. I managed to turn the tables upon them, but things might easily have gone the other way."

"You are a fool to expose yourself to such risks," the king declared. "Tell me exactly what happened."

John Peters told the story, making slight mention of Grace. The king listened eagerly, frowning but attentive.

"Do you suppose," he asked, "that these people were inspired from Bergeland?"

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. "Most likely," he answered. "I asked them why they did n't have a go at you."

"The devil you did!" the king exclaimed. "How dared you put such a thought into their heads?"

"Oh, you 're safe enough," John Peters answered. "They explained that they were not professional anarchists, and a king took too much getting at."

His majesty walked restlessly up and down the room. All his life he had been troubled with the fear of assassination. "I will tell you one thing, John," he said, stopping abruptly. "Whoever rules here during the next twenty years is going to have trouble. They say that the

Republicans will have a majority in the House of Assembly. What will happen then I do not know."

"They will cut down the household emoluments, without a doubt," John Peters remarked. "I really don't think I 'd better get married. I might not be able to support my wife."

A groom of the chambers, with murmurs of apology, placed a small note in the king's hand. He read it hastily and crushed it up between his fingers. "We will drive together to-morrow morning, John," he said. "For the moment I have affairs to attend to."

John Peters paid his respectful adieu and departed. Crossing the library, escorted by the groom of the chambers, he passed a lady, heavily veiled. Her dark eyes sought his for a moment, and then dropped. Momentarily curious, he looked after her, but she had disappeared in the king's room. John Peters smiled a little bitterly as he left the palace.

"So we pay the great tax," he muttered, "young and old, rich and poor! They turn the wheels, and we spin or jump for their pleasure, like monkeys! Curse all women!"

He entered his motor-car, which was waiting at the palace gates. "Drive to the office of the chief of the police," he ordered.

CHAPTER IX

THERE was little room for doubt as to the friendship of the two men who sat on opposite sides of the somewhat bare writing-table. Their very attitude, even the atmosphere about them, seemed to breathe it. John Peters was leaning back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his head, and a cigarette at a rakish angle between his lips. His companion, Philip, Baron Bernhardt, chief commissioner of the police in the very cosmopolitan little capital of Bergeland, was watching him with the quiet content of a man wholly at his ease in congenial society. And yet in the life of each of these two men there were many things hidden from the other.

"So you have returned from your travels, my dear prince," Bernhardt said. "Many congratulations upon your appearance. You must have a constitution of iron."

John Peters smiled. "I am in excellent health, thank you," he said. "Even the London fogs have done me no harm."

Bernhardt nodded thoughtfully. "The London fogs," he remarked, "are sometimes less injurious than the early morning air — in Paris."

The smile on John Peters's face slowly faded away. "What do you know about Paris?" he asked. "This newspaper rot, I suppose."

"It became my business," Bernhardt said smoothly "to make a few inquiries over there."

John Peters looked distinctly annoyed. "My meddlesome uncle, I suppose," he remarked.

Bernhardt smiled. It was not for him to say. "I was able," he said, "to compile a most interesting little journal."

The eyes of the two men met for a moment in silent conflict. Neither, however, learned much from that friendly duel.

"I suppose," John Peters said tentatively, "you think I played the fool over there, eh?"

"You had a gay time," Bernhardt remarked. "There is no doubt about that. The night at the Rat Mort, for instance, and the breakfast afterward — you remember?"

"I remember nothing," John Peters answered grimly. "I never do."

"You remember the motor ride in the morning to Rambouillet?"

"Certainly not!"

"Dear me!" Bernhardt exclaimed. "At least you can settle one point for me which has been on my mind."

"Well?"

"You know that you dined at the Ambassadeurs on

Wednesday night. There was a Comte de Perrill in your party. Give me an idea what he was like. Was he young or old, dark or fair? I have a reason for asking."

"I do not remember," John Peters answered stiffly.

"But, my dear friend, that is not kind of you!" Bernhardt remarked. "It was at the Ambassadeurs you dined, was it not?"

"It may have been," John Peters answered. "Those restaurants are all the same to me when I get away from them."

"You amaze me," Bernhardt said slowly. "Well, tell me about the motor accident, then. You seem to have had a very narrow escape."

"Look here," John Peters said, patting the desk with the palm of his hand, "I should like you to understand this: I am not here to answer your questions. If it comes within the scope of your duty to play the spy on me, you must do it, but I 'm not going to make it any easier for you! I came here to ask questions, not to answer them."

"Fire away then, my young friend," Bernhardt said. "I 'll be more amiable than you. I 'll tell you all you want to know."

"In London," John Peters said, "I stayed for one or two nights on my own responsibility."

"I won't ask you how you managed it," Bernhardt remarked. "Go on."

"I had an adventure," John Peters continued.

"This," Bernhardt declared, "begins to get interesting. Go on. What sort of an adventure?"

"An attempt, of a particularly clumsy sort, was made upon my life."

Bernhardt's smile never left his lips, but his eyes gleamed behind his glasses. "Ah!" he said, "by whom?"

"There were a woman and three men in it," John Peters said, "and a more unbusinesslike, unpractical set of conspirators it would be impossible to imagine. They seemed to form a sort of society for the purpose of killing off the mischievous people of the earth. I recommended my uncle Ferdinand to them, but they did n't seem to see it. They like to take their victims young."

Bernhardt rose from his seat. "Wait a minute," he said. He unlocked an iron door let into the wall, and from an inner shelf drew out an album. "Look through this carefully," he said, "and then tell me if you can recognize any of the four people you speak of. Begin at the end. The earlier ones are almost out of date now."

Very carefully John Peters turned over the pages one by one. About half-way through the book, he stopped. Without a doubt he was looking at a picture of the younger of the three men, the one who had actually attacked him. "That is one of them," he said, touching it with his forefinger; "I am sure of that."

Bernhardt glanced at a number at the bottom of the picture, and going back to the safe, drew out a small ledger. He turned over the pages rapidly. "Here we are," he said; "'Victor Defarge, son of Emil Defarge, lawyer of Maloya. The whole family are advanced thinkers. Victor was a member of the working branch of the league, and reported to be one of the secret party of the Watchers. Wrote a revolutionary article for the *Figaro*, denouncing the reigning house of Bergeland, for which he was expelled from the country. Went to London and lost sight of.' That 's our young man for certain. So he 's up to mischief again. See if you can find any of the others."

John Peters turned over the pages of the album one by one. "None of the others is in here," he announced finally.

Bernhardt looked a little disappointed. "Well," he said, "you seem to have stumbled into something. Do you mind telling me exactly what happened?"

Once more John Peters told his story, and Bernhardt, although he had only the appearance of a moderately interested listener, drank in every syllable. When the story was ended he was silent for several moments.

"Your adventure," he remarked at last, "is a most extraordinary one. I do not understand these people at all. It does n't sound in the least convincing. It sounds, in fact, more like a huge practical joke."

"I found it hard to realize the seriousness of it myself," John Peters admitted, "even when I sat there on the music-stool with my revolver on my knees. But, as a matter of fact, I had a narrow escape. That young man struck a blow at where I ought to have been which would have killed an ox. Fortunately he was a bungler, or I should n't have had the ghost of a chance."

"And you are sure that none of the others is in my album there?" Bernhardt asked meditatively.

"Quite sure," John Peters answered.

Bernhardt unlocked a drawer of his desk and produced a box of cigarettes. He took one himself and passed them across to his guest. "I must smoke," he said; "you have given me something to think about."

There was a short silence. Then John Peters asked a question. "Have you ever heard of any society of anarchists or cut-throats of any sort to which these people may have belonged?"

"I am not quite sure," Bernhardt answered thoughtfully. "I do not suppose you happen to remember it, but a few months ago there were three mysterious murders in one week, one in London, one in Paris, and a third in Turin. They were all well-known people of shocking character. The Duke of Santenan was one. Of course, these crimes may have been due to private vengeance, but I know that at headquarters in Paris there was an idea that

some sort of an organization was at work. You may have encountered these people."

John Peters looked more than a little doubtful. "They gave me the impression of being such rank amateurs," he objected.

Bernhardt did not seem impressed. "You cannot tell," he answered. "For all you know, their plans may have been very craftily laid. The veriest fluke will sometimes upset the most wonderfully laid schemes. I think that I shall have to run over to London for a few days."

"Plenty to do here, is n't there?" John Peters asked.

Bernhardt's countenance darkened. "There is, indeed," he said. "To tell you the truth, my young friend, one would almost believe that you have made up your mind never to sit upon the throne of Bergeland."

John Peters looked across at his friend. "Come," he said, "this is plain speaking. What do you mean?"

"Absolutely what I say. Try to put yourself for a moment in the position of a citizen of this country. He has suffered for many years from the extravagance and the immoral government of your uncle, King Ferdinand."

"Rank high treason, this," John Peters remarked coolly.

"Never mind. You and I don't mince words. What have they to look forward to from you? Nothing much better, to judge from reports. Every little newspaper

makes sensational matter of your delinquencies. What sort of training-ground are the night cafés of Paris, and the worse haunts of Vienna, for a man who is to rule over a great country! What do you suppose can be the feelings of these people, who take note of your career and remember that it is they who will have to pay?"

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. He made no reply.

"What puzzles me most," Bernhardt continued, speaking more slowly, and with his eyes fixed upon his companion, "is that the Prince of Bergeland, whose reputation is fast making him the most unpopular man in the country, is not the man who has honored me for so long with his friendship. In plain words, sir, there is a mystery about you and your doings which, so far, I have not been able to fathom. One could almost imagine that you, sir, had some definite purpose to serve by posing before your people as an unintelligent and dissipated scoundrel."

John Peters rose from his chair. "You have said enough, Bernhardt," he remarked quietly.

"Not too much, I hope?" the other asked, a little anxiously.

"No. I have always given you the privileges of a friend, and among them comes the privilege of frank speech," John Peters answered; "but for the rest, remember that there is plenty to occupy you here in the capital.

The revolutionists are gaining strength every day, I hear."

"They are likely to," Bernhardt replied.

"And this leader of theirs — the man they call the Watcher — he still evades your spies?"

"He has done so up to now," Bernhardt answered, "but I am afraid you do not realize how serious the situation really is. If to-day I knew where to put my hand on any of them, even on their leader himself, I am not sure that I would dare make a single arrest. I believe that it would mean a revolution."

The light shone for a moment in John Peters's eyes, and then disappeared almost as quickly as it had come. "You have the military to fall back upon," he said.

Bernhardt shrugged his shoulders. The gesture was eloquent. "The military!" he remarked. "Do not put too much faith in those fine regiments of yours, my dear prince," he said. "I tell you this frankly: I do not believe that your soldiers would fire upon your townspeople!"

"I am dining at the barracks to-morrow night," John Peters said; "shall I tell the general this?"

"The general," Bernhardt said, "is a pig-headed fool, but he may find out some day that my words are true."

There was a hasty knock at the door, and a man entered from the office outside. He spoke with Bernhardt for a

few minutes in an undertone and then withdrew. Bernhardt turned to his visitor with a grim smile.

"The wolves come nearer," he remarked. "Mademoiselle Clerteau's carriage was attacked by an organized band of men on leaving the palace this afternoon. She was robbed of her jewels, and the carriage was smashed."

"Where were your police, my friend?" John Peters asked calmly.

"Powerless! The square was held by a thousand people. I am sent for to the palace."

John Peters took up his hat. "I would n't be in your shoes," he said.

CHAPTER X

THE maitre d'hotel, with a final bow and a glance round the table, departed. John Peters drew a little breath of relief.

"For what time did you order your carriage, Marie?" he asked.

The girl laughed as she leaned back in her chair. "Not until nine o'clock! It is nearly half an hour. They served dinner so quickly to-night! But, my friend, it is not polite to frown."

John Peters was visibly impatient. He glanced at his watch and sighed. "Very well, little one," he said, "we must make the best of it. Give me some more coffee."

The girl was very pretty, with great coils of red-gold hair, dark eyes, an elegant figure, and a toilet altogether Parisian.

"Do you know that I should have been dancing this evening, with all Varia to admire me and applaud?" she said, with a little pout. "You sent for me, and here I am. All through dinner you have scarcely spoken a word."

"My dear Marie," he protested, "I am sorry to have torn you away from the scene of your triumphs, but it was

part of the bargain, was n't it? To-night it was absolutely necessary. To-morrow night you can console your admirers."

The frown lingered upon her pretty face. "It is n't that I mind coming," she said slowly, "but it is you — who are so queer!"

He looked at her as one might regard a spoiled child. "What is it," he asked, "that I have done wrong?"

"Done wrong!" she repeated. "Why, nothing! But you are not polite. We dine together here in a private room, there is no one else to entertain me, and you — you say nothing, you eat and you drink, and your eyes look through the wall of the room. And it is I who they say is the prettiest woman in Varia! It is very evident that you do not think so."

John Peters looked into the flushed face of his little companion, and laughed softly. He laid his hand upon hers. "Marie," he said, "you must not feel like this about it. Remember that our meetings have an object. You knew all about it before they were arranged."

She tossed her head. "That is all very well," she said, "but here we are, alone, and one would think that I was ugly, or something to be avoided. All the papers say how gay you are, and write about your doings in Paris and London. Am I not pretty enough, then, that you never try to flirt with me?"

"My dear little girl," John Peters said, smiling, "you are pretty enough to steal any man's heart, but just the times when I see you, you must remember, are times when I must be serious. It is n't exactly the season for love-making in Varia just now, is it?"

"No more was it in Paris last week," she answered.

He commenced to laugh, and then, noticing the nervous colour in her cheeks, he checked himself. "You silly child," he answered, "don't believe all the stories you hear about me. I am not quite such a frivolous person as they would have you believe."

"It does n't seem to me that you are frivolous at all," she declared, "or else you must dislike me very much. We have dined here, quite alone, at least a dozen times, and you have never even held my fingers — or wanted to," she added, lifting her eyes to his. "I think it is a little horrid of you."

He passed his arm around her waist, and kissed her lightly on the cheek. "Try to forget all those foolish stories people tell about me," he said. "It is only because I am the Prince of Bergeland that they take the trouble to exaggerate so much. This is no time for love-making, not for Bergians, at any rate."

She rose to her feet a little abruptly, and moving to a mirror which hung from the wall, began to pin on her veil. "I told you an untruth," she said. "I think

that if you ring the bell, you will find that the carriage is at the door."

A few minutes later they passed down the back stairs of the restaurant to the street, and entered the carriage which was waiting. The manager of the restaurant himself bowed them out, and all intruders were kept away. Nevertheless, it was known in all the cafés that night that the crown prince had been dining in a private room at the Lion d'Or with Marie Le Mesurier, *première danseuse* at the Théâtre des Variétés.

They drove through the crowded streets in unbroken silence. John Peters was looking steadily out of the carriage window, watching the throngs of people. Was it his fancy, he wondered, or could he really read in their faces something of that restless discontent with which it was well known that the whole city was seething? At least there was little of the gaiety, the jauntiness, of ordinary holiday-makers in their movements. On they swept — an unending stream, men and women, youths and maidens, promenading, crowding round the cafés, talking together in little groups. He could almost fancy that he heard his own name upon their lips; he could fancy the contemptuous smile with which they would regard him if by chance their eyes could see into his swiftly moving carriage. He to rule over them — degenerate son of a degenerate race! He seemed to hear

the low roar of protest from a thousand throats. He was proved unfit!

The girl's fingers closed upon his. She was looking intently into his face. "Tell me," she begged, "what is wrong with you to-night? You look as though you saw ghosts all the time. Are you so unhappy?"

The perfume of her violets filled the carriage, her curls touched his cheek, her fingers — she had drawn off her glove — burned his hand. John Peters sat rigid, struggling to hide his aversion. The whole flavour of femininity just then was hateful to him. But because she was a pawn in the great game, a foolish but a well-meaning woman, he spoke to her kindly.

"I have troubles," he said, "and perhaps to-night they weigh a little more heavily than usual. You must not bother your little head about me. To-morrow evening you will be able to dance, and sup with whom you choose to make happy."

"I do not wish to sup with anybody," she said in a low tone, "and I do not wish to dance, unless you come to your box."

John Peters sighed. He was not a vain man, but he was forced to understand. "Little Marie," he said to her gently, "I have not much heart for such things just now. We have very serious things to think about — all of us who are interested in our country. And besides ——"

She nestled quite close to him. "It is the 'besides' I want to know about," she whispered.

"I have had trouble of my own just lately," he said. "There was some one ——"

"A woman?"

He nodded. "It was in London," he said, "and she was not very kind."

The girl's lips quivered. "She was a fool," she declared angrily. "I should like to tell her so!"

After that they drove on in silence. John Peters knew very well that his companion was crying softly, but he affected to be unconscious of it. It was the safest way. And presently the carriage drew up before a tall block of apartment houses in one of the quietest parts of the city. They passed inside together, and the concierge lifted his hat. In the elevator Marie handed him her key. John Peters was muffled up to the mouth, but the elevator man stood bareheaded. It was all part of the game, and they knew him well enough.

Marie's apartment was on the fourth floor. John Peters turned the key and stood aside for her to enter.

"Good night, little woman!" said he kindly. "Run to your room, and remember, on no account stir out or let any one in. I will see to that."

She came up to him with a sudden impulsive haste, and took both his hands. "I am sorry," she said, looking up

into his eyes, "very sorry, indeed, and I think that that girl in London is a fool!"

She kissed his hands suddenly and glided away. With a queer little smile on his lips, John Peters watched her pass into her rooms and close the door. Then, descending another flight of the stone steps, he opened the door of another apartment with a key fastened to his chain. Here he passed into a small sitting-room, elegantly furnished, and with a large writing-table at one end. From a drawer he took out a small, black silk mask and fitted it on. Then he carefully removed his rings, studied himself for a moment in the glass, and afterward turned out all the lights but one. From across the square came the slow chiming of a clock. Almost simultaneously came a soft knocking at the outside door. John Peters rose and opened it, returning at once to his seat in front of the writing-table.

CHAPTER XI

JOHN PETERS, his face masked, his body in the shadow, sat in the darkest corner of the dimly lit room. Facing him, at the farther end of the table, sat three men side by side. On the left was Levitt, editor of the *Republican Times*, spectacled, black-bearded, with massive forehead and protruding eyebrows; in the middle, Professor Hoyten, of the Varian University, a milder looking man, with white beard and hair, delicate features, and the soft eyes of the idealist; and on the right, the man who was universally named as the first president of the new republic, Francis Grammont, a lawyer and a statesman, dark, saturnine, clean-shaven, and one of the most eloquent members of the Bergian Parliament, a member of an ancient family, but a Republican from conviction — a man strong and wise, hated at court, but loved and respected throughout the country.

John Peters was in the act of addressing these three men.

"I have sent for you," he said, "because I have had placed before me a full report of the last meeting of the Republican League of Watchers. There seems to be a great deal of discontent. Explain it to me."

"That," Levitt said, "is easily done. The younger members of our party are convinced that the time has come for action. The people throughout the country are in a state of discontent. One hears nothing but murmurs against our wretched government. The king, in his old age, grows more vicious. The crown prince devotes every minute of his time to piling dissipation upon dissipation. Your scheme, sir, for the future government of this country, has been met with thunderous applause. Our agents everywhere come in with the same story. The country is ripe for the blow. We cannot hold back the people whom your great proposals have so excited. They demand that the blow shall be struck."

John Peters was silent for a moment. "How do they propose to act?" he asked.

"There is only one way!" Grammont exclaimed, leaning forward in his chair. "All the nations of the world that have won their freedom have won it at the point of the sword. A blow must be struck. The king and the crown prince must be removed. I am not a bloodthirsty man, but I say that this is a necessity."

"Have you considered," John Peters asked, "the inevitable consequences of a massacre at the palace? All the countries whose friendship was worth having would at once break off diplomatic relations with us. We should be ostracized by all Europe!"

"Are you sure about that, sir?" Grammont asked. "The assassination of the king and the crown prince would, of course, be wholly unauthorized by the state. We should regret it, and punish the murderers — if they were caught. But in the meantime our new government would be proclaimed in a perfectly constitutional manner. Would any one think it worth while to interfere with us?"

"You must remember," John Peters said, "that there are at least half a dozen other claimants to the throne. Each of the powers would support one or the other. We should become a plaything for the powers to squabble about."

"What, then, is your proposition, sir?" Grammont asked.

"I maintain," John Peters declared firmly, "that our best and wisest course is to make this change of government a bloodless one. The elections throughout the country are giving us an immense majority. Not even the king can keep Parliament from assembling in a month's time. Within five minutes of its meeting it can vote in the new government and demand the abdication of the king. I believe that when he realizes the real position of affairs he will go."

"There would still be the crown prince to be reckoned with," Grammont said thoughtfully. "For all his faults, he is no coward. He would make for the army."

"The prince," John Peters declared, "should do no mischief. I myself would see that he was taken care of for a little time. Remember, my friends, that we are responsible for founding a new chapter in the history of this country. As the pages read, so will our descendants, for generations, bless or curse us. There is one thing, remember, from which a nation can never escape — its past. That is why we at this moment should be so careful. The blood that is shed to-day makes shameful history for all time."

"I believe," the professor said quietly, "that we are listening to wise words. I declare myself against all deeds of violence, so far as they can possibly be avoided."

"And I also," Grammont agreed, "but I doubt very much whether we can keep control of the people any longer. Only to-day they wrecked the carriage of one of the king's mistresses. The whole of the square was in their hands, and there was no one to interfere. They will be harder than ever to deal with now."

"The king is an old man," John Peters said. "His murder would alienate all Europe and ruin our cause. I cannot sanction it. I go further: I must forbid it."

There was a short, tense silence. The three men looked at one another in some disquiet. At the head of the table John Peters sat, stern and unbending. Though his face was unseen to them, his very attitude, no less than the ring

of authority in his tone, bespoke finality. It was Grammont who seemed chosen to be the spokesman of the three.

"Sir," he said, "within all the limits of reason and possibility we acknowledge you to be the actual head of the revolutionary party of Bergeland. It was you — or rather your wonderful letters — that first gave weight to our cause, and brought into our ranks many of its most intelligent supporters. The very fact, perhaps, of your anonymity lent, after a time, weight to your carefully considered and always eloquent counsels. I think that you, on your part, will admit that we, too, have kept our share of the agreement. We have never once sought to penetrate the incognito which it has seemed wise to you tc assume. We have recognized in you a born leader, and often with the greatest difficulty we have persuaded the general committee to support us in our unswerving obedience to your rule. You will acknowledge this, sir, I trust. You will admit that we have done our best in a very difficult situation."

John Peters inclined his head in stiff assent. "All that you say," he admitted, "is true. What more?"

"Our party," Grammont continued, "has become like a young giant suddenly conscious of his strength. Our numbers are enormous. It seems, indeed, as though all that is best and noblest in Bergeland has flocked to our standard. Our organization, thanks to you, sir, is perfect.

Even we, who have reached the age when reason triumphs over enthusiasms, cannot blind ourselves to the fact that to-day we are the undeclared masters of the country. We are a party, too, ready to strike, ready with our programme, ready with our government. Sir, you cannot hold back an avalanche! So far we have been your spokesmen. If you send us back without our mandate, I warn you that we are powerless. What you have created has grown too great for inaction."

John Peters was silent for several moments. He knew truth when he heard it, and the words were ringing in his ears. "It was always my intention," he said, speaking now in a lower tone, "that this change should come about naturally, on the death of the king. He is old and in poor health. The day of his death was to have been our day. What is it that you propose?"

"That we seize the palace," Grammont answered. "Let the king and the crown prince fly, or take their chances. Whatever may come to them, they have deserved."

"So far as regards the crown prince," John Peters said slowly, "I might be with you. He is young, let him take his chance. But the king is an old man — too old to fight. If anything happened to him, it might mean ruin to our cause. Remember that the most ambitious monarch of all looks always longingly upon our little kingdom. At

an hour's notice his troops could overrun our country. He wants only an excuse."

"England would never suffer it, or France," Grammont declared.

"Who can tell?" John Peters answered. "A man's sins are forgotten when he has expiated them. No country can easily rise to greatness that stoops first to regicide."

"The risks have all been counted," Grammont said quietly. "The truth is best. We cannot keep our people back any longer. More than half the army is with us. Sir, if you would delay this thing even for a month you can do it only by declaring yourself and arguing your own cause. We three have been swept off our feet. They will listen no longer to moderate counsels from us."

"That," John Peters said, "I cannot do. Who I am or what I am makes little difference to our cause. But in the name of all that I have done, go back to your committee and tell them this: I demand that no definite blow be struck against the king until the meeting of Parliament. I claim this as my right."

"You mean to warn him?" the professor asked thoughtfully.

"I do," John Peters answered. "You may tell me that his life is forfeit to the state, and I answer you that he is

an old man, and violence against gray hairs has before now set a continent ablaze."

"We will do our best," the professor said slowly. "It is not an easy task that you have set us, but what men can do we will."

There was a brief silence. Then John Peters spoke once more. "A week hence, if all goes well," he said, "we meet here — for the last time, if your words are true. For the present, I think that we have finished."

Levitt rose. "Sir," he said, "I take the liberty of propounding a certain matter to you."

"Go on, then," John Peters said.

"The future government of this country, sir, has been mapped out," Levitt said, "by you. Every office of state has been allotted to certain men, carefully and soundly chosen. You have shown a knowledge almost miraculous, both of the resources of the country and its citizens. And with all that, one asks where, in the future destinies of this country, comes the great brain which has planned its freedom. The names of all the selected ministers are known to us. Yours is not among them! Yours, which should surely head the list, if ever merit and deserts are to count, is wholly absent from it. I speak, sir, not only on my own account, but on behalf of that great people whom your hand has guided to liberty, and I say that you, sir, and no

one else, should head that list as president of the new republic!"

"It is God's truth!" the professor declared.

But John Peters shook his head. "My friends," he said, "such a reward is not for me. Believe me, there is no post in the new government which I could fill. I do not seek for such things. I am one of those who look out upon life, and whose eyes, for that reason, perhaps, are all the clearer. I am content to do what I believe to be my duty. Listen!"

No need for that last word. All four men were upon their feet. They were trained to alarms, and their actions were almost instinctive. John Peters, with a sweep of his arm, cleared the table of the papers which earlier in the evening they had been studying, and with a couple of long strides passed through the inner door into the room beyond. The other three kept their places, except that the professor, with a freshly lit cigarette in his mouth, strolled over toward the fireplace, and stood with his back to it, as though warming himself. And then a latch-key turned, and the door was opened. Bernhardt stood there, and behind him others. He closed the door, however, and left them outside.

Like lightning his eyes flashed round the room, and his face fell. Once more was he to be disappointed! The professor, Levitt, Grammont — he knew them all so well!

They were in his power at any time. But this mysterious leader — was he always to evade him? Then his revolver flashed out suddenly. He threw open the door and called to those outside.

"Quick! Search the place!" he commanded. "Through that door! There are four chairs at the table, and three men here. A thousand francs for that fourth man!"

CHAPTER XII

JOHN PETERS half rose to his feet, and a black frown darkened his face. Bernhardt stood upon the threshold of the door, which he had just opened unannounced.

"What is the meaning of this, Bernhardt?" John Peters asked quickly. "Is anything wrong at the palace? Do you come here for me?"

For a second or two Bernhardt made no reply. He stood just inside the door, which he had carefully closed behind him, and his eyes flashed around the room in silent, intense scrutiny. To all appearances the scene which his coming had interrupted was ordinary enough. Marie had changed her gown for a white negligée robe, fastened at the throat with a jewelled pin and around the waist with a girdle. Her hair was a little disarranged, the two chairs were very close together. On a small table close at hand was a half-empty bottle of champagne, two glasses, and a box of cigarettes. Marie held one still between her fingers, the smoke of which went curling up to the ceiling. She, too, had turned, and was facing the intruder with flushed face and angry eyes.

"No," Bernhardt answered. "To tell you the truth, I did not expect to find you here." [*Page* 101

"How dare you enter my rooms without permission?" she demanded. "Have you stolen my keys? What does he mean by it?" she added, turning abruptly toward her companion.

"I do not know," John Peters answered, "but since he is here, he shall tell us. Are you spying on me, sir?"

"No," Bernhardt answered. "To tell you the truth, I did not expect to find you here. I am in search of some one else."

"Of whom, then?" Marie demanded.

Bernhardt did not answer at once. John Peters had risen to his feet, and the eyes of the two men met. Bernhardt's gaze was cold, direct, inquiring; John Peters seemed as though he had suddenly remembered his royal estate. He had drawn himself up to his full height, and there was a new hauteur in his tone.

"You would have us believe that your visit is a coincidence, perhaps, Baron," he said. "We are not quite so gullible. You will be so good as to explain your presence here without any further delay."

"I am in search of the Watcher," Bernhardt answered calmly.

"Then for heaven's sake, search!" John Peters answered contemptuously. "Lift up the table-cloth, try behind the curtains. There is an inner room there!

Never mind asking this young lady's permission. The Watcher is perhaps under her bed."

Bernhardt was weakening. He looked irresolutely around.

"You have been in search of this person for some time, I believe," John Peters said coldly. "Might one inquire why you are prosecuting your inquiries in this direction?"

"You will doubtless be surprised to hear," Bernhardt said, "that a meeting of the committee over which the Watcher presides has been held in this building to-night."

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. "In this building!" he repeated. "Well, what of it? Grammont has a flat here, has n't he? Did you arrest them all?"

"We have arrested no one," Bernhardt answered. "I know every member of the Committee of Watchers but one. We can arrest them at any time. It is the Watcher himself that I am after."

"Good luck to you!" John Peters said scornfully. "If your attempts to secure him are of the order of your present one, he will go a long time free, I fancy."

"I am not so sure," Bernhardt answered.

John Peters smiled. "There is some method in your madness, then?" he asked, with faint irony.

"Perhaps," Bernhardt answered, and his eyes wandered once more around the room.

"You have a clue?" John Peters demanded. "The Watcher has probably learned the secret of making himself invisible, or of flitting through keyholes; in which case he may still be here!"

"I am not sure whether you would call it a clue," Bernhardt answered, "but the man himself was in the apartment under this one a few minutes ago. He has not descended by either the stairs or the elevator. It seemed possible that there might be some means of communication with the apartments immediately above. The others are now being searched."

"Marvellous!" John Peters murmured; "but you do not search. You waste time. There are not many hiding-places here, but you cannot tell. The Watcher must be a desperate man, with you so close to his heels. Take my advice. Look under mademoiselle's bed. She permits you, I am sure."

Marie threw her cigarette into the fire with a scornful little gesture, and lit another.

"But what does he think I am, this man," Marie demanded, "that he should search for men in my apartments?"

"He is a little confused, perhaps, also a little upset," John Peters said, with gentle sarcasm. "To have come so near arresting the Watcher, and then to lose him, must be maddening. We must make allowances for our poor

friend. Come, tell me, Baron, don't you mean to arrest the others, then?"

"I do not," Bernhardt answered. "They are of no interest to me. I can put my hand upon them anywhere, at any moment. There is no need for me to risk a rising by arresting them. I want the man whose brain has created and nourished this infernal conspiracy."

"But would not the same argument apply where he is concerned?" John Peters asked. "If the people knew that you had him, would they not rise for him?"

Once more the eyes of the two men met.

"There would be no time," Bernhardt said coldly.

"There are laws in the country," John Peters said.

"Laws can be broken — to save the country," Bernhardt answered. "If I arrest the Watcher to-night, I swear to you that he shall die before morning."

John Peters laughed softly. "You are in a blood-thirsty frame of mind to-night, my friend," he said. "You speak of things you would not dare to do."

Bernhardt laughed shortly. "Come and see me in the morning," he suggested, "and I will show you things that you will find surprising. You may even condescend to be alarmed."

John Peters yawned. "I doubt it," he remarked. "By the by, Bernhardt, that is an excellent suggestion of yours — about to-morrow morning. I wish you would go

away now. A person of your discrimination may perhaps realize that you are, to say the least, something of an intruder."

"I will go," Bernhardt answered, "but first ——"

He crossed the room toward the window, and drew aside the curtain. The window was open a few inches.

"You keep your rooms well aired, mademoiselle," he remarked, looking out into the night.

Marie laughed. "Why not?" she answered. "One of my windows is always open."

"Indeed!" Bernhardt remarked. "That is very interesting. Permit me!"

He threw up the window to the top, and leaned out. He remained there for several moments. Then he closed the window, crossed the room quickly, and with the handle of the door in his hand, turned and bowed his adieu.

"My most profound apologies," he said, "and good night!"

But Marie was to see him again. She was awakened in the middle of the night by the sudden flooding of her room with electric light. She sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes. By her side was Bernhardt.

"This is infamous!" she exclaimed angrily. "How dare you come here? How dare you enter my room?"

"Young lady," Bernhardt said sternly, "listen to me.

I am chief of the police of this city, and I do as I choose. Don't waste your breath making angry speeches. Listen to me instead. What I have to say is worth hearing."

She looked at him steadfastly. Her eyes were a little frightened, and her breath came quickly. It was an ordeal, this, for her.

"I am going to ask you certain questions," Bernhardt continued. "If you answer them, it is an affair of a diamond bracelet; if you answer them so that I gain the information I need, it is an affair, also, of a necklace."

Still she said nothing, but her eyes flashed at the mention of the diamonds, and Bernhardt smiled to himself.

"Is the crown prince indeed your friend?"

She shrugged her shoulders scornfully. "You begin foolishly," she said. "All the world knows it."

"All the world believes it," Bernhardt interrupted coolly. "For myself — well, I ask you the question."

"He is," she declared steadily.

Bernhardt never took his eyes off her. She turned away from him a little petulantly. "How long had the prince been with you this evening when I appeared?"

"We dined together at the Café Lion d'Or," she answered. "Private room Number 7. You can go and make inquiries if you like. We came straight back here. I think that we arrived about nine. You can ask the concierge."

Bernhardt nodded. "And the prince had not left you between the time of your arrival and the time of my appearance?"

"Assuredly not," Marie answered. "Why should he?"

"You drank wine and smoked and talked?"

"Naturally!" Marie declared.

Bernhardt was silent for a moment. "You received no other visitor?" he asked.

"None!" she replied, with a little toss of the head.

"You have nothing to tell me, then!"

"What should I have? I have answered your questions."

He looked at her critically. "The crown prince has good taste," he remarked. "Diamonds would suit you admirably."

"Do you want me to lie to you for them?" she asked, more at her ease. "If so, tell me what to say, and I will say it."

"No. I want the truth," he answered shortly. "I want, if I can, to save the country. You, I see, are not disposed to help me."

"Tell me what you mean?" she asked.

"I want to arrest the Watcher," he answered. "I will give twenty thousand francs to the person who helps me."

She looked at him with glistening eyes. "You don't

really believe," she asked, "that he was near here last night?"

"Twenty thousand francs," he repeated softly. "One could do much with that. And one might save some lives. But the time is short. It must be now or never — now or within, say, the next twenty-four hours."

CHAPTER XIII

SIR," John Peters said, "we are in a devil of a mess." The king frowned. He considered his nephew altogether too democratic. "I do not like your phraseology, and I do not agree with your conclusion," he said. "You must have been talking with Bernhardt. That man is crazy. He actually wants me to let off those scoundrels who stopped Mademoiselle Clerteau's carriage in the square yesterday. Let them off! I would shoot them all if I could. What right have the populace to interfere with the amusements of their rulers!"

"It is n't only Bernhardt," John Peters said. "I 've been having a look around myself, and I don't like the looks of things at all. I suppose you know the results of the elections up to now?"

"I know that the Republicans have gained a few seats," the king answered. "What of it? We shall have a majority in the end."

"Bet you five to one we don't!" John Peters said, strolling to a table and helping himself to a cigarette. "I know for a fact that when all the returns are in the Republicans or whatever they call themselves,

will have a majority in the House. What about supplies then?"

"I shall dissolve Parliament," the king answered.

"And we," John Peters said, leaning against the mantelpiece, and watching his cigarette smoke curl upward, "shall be in the unfortunate position of a king and a crown prince without a kingdom. There will be a revolution."

The king was angry. He was a fine-looking man still, and the fierce light which blazed in his eyes made him appear many years younger. "Nephew," he said, "I believe you are a coward!"

"I 'm rather afraid that I am — in that way," John Peters answered calmly. "I never could shut my eyes to facts. The people hate us. I 'm not sure that I wonder at it."

"We will teach them to fear us, then," the king said grimly. "You forget that we hold the whip-hand."

"The whip-hand?" John Peters repeated.

"We have the army," the king said. "General Grobener sent in his report last night. There are seventy-six hundred men in barracks."

"No earthly use," John Peters declared blithely. "They 'd fight an enemy right enough; they would n't fight their own people."

"They would fight for their king anywhere," his uncle declared.

"You try 'em," John Peters answered. "The revolutionists have got hold of them. I know what I 'm talking about."

"If I believed you," the king said, "I should send a special envoy to Berlin to-morrow."

John Peters smiled. "I do not fancy," he said, "that our august kinsman is very keen on trying to bolster up losing causes; and besides, what about our own people? Would you be content to sit upon a throne which was yours only by the grace of a foreigner?"

"The trouble would pass," the king answered. "The people would come to their senses."

"If you will not be convinced," John Peters said, shrugging his shoulders, "I suppose we must take our chances. I 've a fancy they mean to assassinate us."

"I shall decline," the king said, "to lend myself to anything of the sort, and I wish you 'd stop talking nonsense, John. If you asked me, I could tell you who is the less popular in the country, you or me. You have n't had the grace to cover up your misdeeds. I have. So long as I live, I believe the country is safe. It is after I am dead that the trouble will commence, especially if you don't mend your ways."

John Peters walked to the window and looked out upon the square. In front of the iron gates sentries were walking up and down; beyond was a press of people passing

backward and forward. Was it his fancy, he wondered, or could he even at that distance detect something different in the way they walked and turned their heads to gaze toward the palace? He turned again to face the king, who was talking to his secretary. "Bernhardt is outside," his majesty remarked. "Desires an audience. Shall we see him together?"

"By all means," John Peters said. "I should like to hear what he has to say. I should like you to hear it, too!"

Bernhardt was ushered in. The two men smiled as they exchanged greetings.

"You two have met before this morning?" the king asked, looking from one to the other.

"Last night, your Majesty," Bernhardt answered, bowing low. "I came across his Royal Highness last night."

The king nodded grimly. "I won't ask you where it was," he said. "Some disreputable corner of the city, doubtless. Is there any news?"

Bernhardt hesitated for a moment. "There is nothing fresh, your Majesty," he said. "My men surprised a secret meeting of the Watchers last night, but we had no luck."

"You failed again, then?" the king said, frowning.

"We did, your Majesty," Bernhardt answered, "and

yet," he added, glancing carelessly for a moment toward John Peters, "I am not sure that it was altogether a failure. If only we had a little more time."

"A little more time! What do you mean?" the king asked hastily.

Bernhardt turned toward him with grave face. "Your Majesty," he answered, "I am exceedingly sorry to report that I fear a general rising of the people will take place within the next few days. It is my duty to warn you of this, and I beg to suggest that you send for General Grobener at once. It is important that we should know exactly what the spirit of the military is at the present moment."

The king's face seemed to harden. He drew himself up to his full height, and his keen, rather small eyes were fixed upon Bernhardt's face. "Are you and my nephew in collusion?" he asked.

Bernhardt shook his head. "Your Majesty," he said, "we are a long way from being in collusion, a very long way indeed."

"Very well," the king said, "we will send for General Grobener. If there is going to be any rioting, the people shall be taught the lesson of their lives."

He rang the bell for his secretary, and gave a few orders. Then he turned once more to Bernhardt. "Tell me," he said, "what has brought all this about? It is only

during the last three years that one has heard of this discontent."

"It is the work of one man, sir," Bernhardt answered. "The Watcher, whoever he may be, is the one person who is responsible for the condition of the country."

"And during three years," the king said coldly, "you have failed to arrest him, knowing very well the mischief he was doing."

"Your Majesty," Bernhardt answered, "you could inflict upon me no punishment so severe as the humiliation which I carry with me day and night."

"Sir," the king said, his face full of cold wrath, "this is a small country, you have had an ample force of police and spies, and you mean to tell me that here, under your very nose, this man has lived in secrecy for three years?"

"I am ashamed to confess it, your Majesty, but it is true," said Bernhardt. "I might ask you to remember that most of this extraordinary person's work has been done by pamphlets and organizations, and I know for a fact that even the Watchers themselves have met him only six times and have never seen his face. I am perfectly convinced that he is a person with a double personality, and I also know that he is in the city to-day."

"All that you appear to know amounts to nothing, sir," the king declared. "Can you arrest him to-day?"

Bernhardt shook his head. "Your Majesty," he said,

"I cannot. After to-morrow, it is possible that we may all know him."

"Why after to-morrow?" John Peters asked.

"Because it is rumoured that if the men who smashed Mademoiselle Clerteau's carriage in the square yesterday are committed for trial, he will lead a hundred thousand rioters to the palace."

"A hundred thousand fiddlesticks!" the king exclaimed testily. "Why, there are not a hundred thousand revolutionists in the city, or anything like it!"

"It is from the country districts that the people are to come, your Majesty," Bernhardt answered. "The organization of all the clubs in the smaller districts is wonderful. They have special trains already ordered. Unless we hold the railway stations, they can pour two or even three hundred thousand people into the city."

"And you are the person," the king remarked, with ominous coldness, "who has permitted this organization to develop into such a power?"

"Your Majesty," Bernhardt answered, "they break the law nowhere. Interference is not possible. It is only the Watchers who have rendered themselves in the slightest degree liable to the law. The policy of arresting men of such high repute, and with such a following, has been discussed repeatedly by your Majesty's council."

"There is only one man," the king said, "whom it is worth while to arrest — the Watcher himself. Arrest him, and see that he does not live through the night, and we would soon purge the city of this madness."

"Your Majesty," Bernhardt said, "I have done my best, and I have failed. If my resignation ——"

"Rubbish!" the king interrupted. "This is no time to talk about resignations. The trouble is upon us. Do you mean to say that you have not even a suspicion as to this man's other personality?"

Bernhardt stood for a moment irresolute. "Your Majesty," he said, "last night a wild idea came to me."

An usher threw open the door, announcing General Grobener. The king turned to greet him. John Peters let his hand fall upon Bernhardt's arm.

"Don't say anything foolish," he whispered. "If you do, you may regret it."

"The Watcher," Bernhardt said slowly, "was concealed by some one in the building last night — some one whose apartment is in the outside block."

"You don't suspect mademoiselle?" John Peters said, smiling.

"Why not?" Bernhardt answered. "Your Highness knows that she has more lovers than one."

"I will swear that I was the only man in her rooms last night," John Peters declared.

The king turned toward them with a smile of triumph. "At last," he said, "I have found a man who can talk sense. General Grobener is prepared to stake his honour upon his men."

Bernhardt turned to face him. "You mean that, General?" he asked.

"I do," the general answered impressively. "All this revolutionist nonsense is pure civilian folly. My men are staunch."

"Then for heaven's sake," Bernhardt declared, "announce a review for the day after to-morrow, and get them under arms."

"If his Majesty orders it," General Grobener answered, "it shall be done."

"In the square," the king declared, "a full artillery review. A few Maxim guns will be the best answer to those who talk of revolutions. Let it be announced in the *Gazette* this evening. What do you say, nephew?"

"I wish I shared the general's faith," John Peters said dryly. "However, I suppose it is the only card we have left to play, unless your Majesty ——"

"Well?"

"Unless your Majesty were to order a special train to-morrow morning, and take Mademoiselle Clerteau back to Paris."

The king stamped upon the floor. "You mean

abdicate!" he cried. "I would sooner die in the square there!"

John Peters turned once more to the window, with a faint smile upon his lips. "It may come to that," he said, "for both of us."

CHAPTER XIV

HE CAME upon her suddenly from out of the shadows of a gloomy afternoon, and she stared at him as though she had seen a ghost.

"You!" she exclaimed, "you!"

Other words failed her. He looked at her intently for a moment and then laughed. To her the laugh sounded most unnatural.

"Why not?"

"I don't know," she answered, a little lamely, "only I have been reading the papers, and it seemed to me that just now your place was in your own country."

The idea seemed to amuse him, and again his laugh sounded strangely unfamiliar to her.

"I like London better," he declared. The way he looked at her, too, was amazing.

She moved on a little nervously. He kept by her side.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Home," she answered, pausing at the door of an apartment house. "We have just finished a matinée. This is my nearest way in."

She half held out her hand. He affected not to see it.

"Won't you ask me in?" he begged.

"If you like, of course," she answered. "I did n't fancy ——"

"Oh, I 'd like to come," he declared.

She looked at him wonderingly. "You are a brave man," she said.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Well, you remember the last time," she remarked.

He shook his head. "I never remember the things which it is wiser to forget," he declared.

They went in silence up to her rooms. He laid his hat down upon the table, and she looked at him wonderingly.

"What has happened to change you so?" she demanded. "You are ——"

"Anything you like to call me," he answered. "John Peters, if you will."

She drew a little breath. "I was beginning to wonder," she confessed. "Your features are the same, but your whole expression seems to have changed."

"I 've been having a rough time," he confessed.

"It is n't that," she answered; "you are different, are n't you? What is it?"

"I am learning," he declared, "to take life a little less seriously."

She nodded. "That is how you look," she admitted. "It changes you."

He leaned toward her. "In one thing," he whispered in her ear, "I have not changed, I shall never change. And you ——"

She drew away from him, a curious sensation of fear coming over her. She was certain that he was going to try to kiss her. It was a nightmare, this. She felt his hot breath upon her cheek, and drew angrily away.

"You are different," she cried, standing with her finger upon the bell. "I do not recognize you. Please go away. I have rung for my maid. Do please go!"

He picked up his hat and left her with a light word. She looked after him in horror. He went jauntily down the corridor, looking back once to wave his hand. She closed her door and locked it. A moment or so later a knock came. She rang for her maid.

"Don't let any one in unless I know who it is," she ordered.

The maid opened the door and looked round. "It is Sir Gilbert, madam," she announced.

Grace gave a little murmur of relief. She rose and held out both her hands. "Do come in," she said, "I 'm so glad to see you. Did you pass any one in the corridor?"

"I recognized some one stepping out of the elevator," Sir Gilbert answered. "I think that your friend has come into line with us others, eh? More of the Kingdom of

Earth about his expression to-day, I think, than the other place."

She shivered. "I met him just now in the street," she said. "He came in with me. He was only here five minutes. I did n't understand him."

Sir Gilbert shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he said, "I'm glad you were able to get rid of him without any trouble. I suppose it 's one of the things you 're liable to, living alone like this. I wish to the dickens you 'd chuck it, Grace."

"What would you have me do then?" she inquired, smiling.

"Oh, take a house — you could afford it well enough, or cut the stage altogether and marry me. I 'll give you the prettiest house in London."

"This is a serious proposal?" she asked.

"Am I not always serious?" he demanded. "I 've proposed to you nearly every week for two months."

She nodded. "You 're getting quite skilful," she said. "I 'd really think of it, but I 've half promised to sign a contract to go abroad."

"When?" he demanded.

"In a week or two — when we close here. We are going to Germany, and call at some places on the way."

He dropped his eye-glass, and looked thoughtfully into the fire. "I am sorry," he said.

"Why?"

"I like you in England best," he answered, "and I hate you on the stage at all."

She laughed softly. "My dear Gilbert," she said, "one must do something."

"Not necessarily," he dissented. "You have money enough, and a decent fellow waiting to marry you, if you 'd have him. And besides, you have n't any real vocation for the stage. You are not a great actress. You never will be one. You are just capable and clever, and nice to look at. Those gifts would do you as well anywhere else. By the by"—he turned and looked at her—"what first made you go on the stage? I never quite understood."

She shrugged her shoulders. "One must do something. I was weary of the ordinary things."

"But you never indulged in the ordinary things," he reminded her. "You were always far above that. I remember that when you left Wellesley you were a person to be feared. You were great at social science, and you shocked everyone by that article of yours in the *Fortnightly* in defence of Anarchy. You were a frightful blue-stocking with most bloodthirsty views. And then you gave up everything and went on the stage. Others, besides myself, were puzzled. Why did you do it, I wonder?"

"I had a reason, certainly," she admitted, "but it is not one that I can tell you."

"You mean that?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"I do."

He sighed. "Well," he said, "I should have liked your confidence."

"I would give it to you, if to any one," she said, a little wearily. "I dare say I have made rather a muddle of my life. Most people would say so. Sometimes I am sure of it myself. But such as it is, I must go on with it. I dare say it will come out all right."

"But what," he asked, "is to be the end of it? I do not honestly believe that you have any ambitions connected with the stage, and you say that you don't want to marry. Yet you are not the sort of person to live aimlessly."

"Has n't it ever occurred to you," she asked, smiling, "that there may be things in my life which I choose, or am forced, to keep to myself? One is apt to judge too much by exteriors, you know."

"Then I am more than ever in the dark," he confessed, "and I don't like being in the dark where you are concerned."

There was a tap at the door, and a man entered somewhat abruptly. He was dark, with black beard and hair, of medium height, fashionably dressed, but in a manner which somehow suggested the foreigner. The look which passed between Grace and him indicated a certain

familiarity, which somehow stirred a queer feeling of resentment in Ferringhall.

"Come in, Mr. St. Dalmas," Grace said, motioning him to a chair. "Sir Gilbert Ferringhall, Mr. St. Dalmas."

The two men exchanged scanty greetings. The newcomer settled down in his chair, with the obvious air of an habitué, and one who meant to stop. In a few minutes Ferringhall rose to go.

"I am coming to see the play to-night," he remarked, as he shook hands with Grace.

"What, again?" she laughed.

"Why not? You would n't care to come to supper afterward?"

She shook her head. "Not to-night. I 'm always tired matinée days. Come and see me again soon."

He felt himself dismissed and he went. He left the house and turned aimlessly westward. "Damn that fellow!" he muttered to himself. "I wonder who he is?"

The "fellow" was standing with his back to the fire, lighting a cigarette. "I hate your society friends, Grace," he said heartily.

She looked at him coldly. "Gilbert Ferringhall is one of my very best and dearest friends," she remarked. "There is no one whom I am more glad to see here."

"You ought to drop these outside people," he said; "they distract your mind."

"Sometimes," she said, with a little sigh, "a little distraction is welcome."

He looked at her, frowning heavily. "I don't like to hear you talk like that," he said.

"Perhaps not! One has humours sometimes."

He threw out his hand, a swift, sweeping gesture. "A woman, perhaps. Well, never mind. You leave next week — or is it the week after — for Berlin for three nights, and three in Varia."

She nodded. "Well?"

"There is a commission for you."

Her eyes were filled with fear. "Where?"

"In Varia."

He looked at her contemptuously. She had turned pale.

"You are not the woman you were," he said. "I am not sure that you are to be trusted. No, I don't mean that," he added quickly, as she raised her head, "I mean your nerve."

"My nerve is all right," she answered him quietly, "and what I undertake to do I shall do. But one can't help wishing that theories, and the practical applications one draws from them, were not quite so far apart."

"Well, it 's nothing to frighten you this time," he said

grimly. "You have to meet and deliver some messages from us to the real ruler of Bergeland."

"And who is he?" she asked.

"He is the secret head of the revolutionist party there," St. Dalmas answered. "They call him the Watcher."

CHAPTER XV

JOHN PETERS stood still for a moment at the corner of the ill-lit street, and thrust his hands deep down into the pockets of his ulster. Very deliberately he produced a handful of cigarettes, chose one and lit it. And all the time every sense was upon the alert; his eyes were straining through the darkness. He was being followed! He had suspected it before; he was sure of it now. The footsteps had ceased. Somewhere in those shadows the person to whom they belonged was lurking.

He thought for a moment, steadfastly, earnestly. Then he lurched on down the street, walking with the exaggerated care of a drunken man, his cigarette at a ridiculous angle, whistling occasional snatches of a popular ditty. Every now and then he paused, as though not quite certain of his whereabouts, and he studied the names of the streets at every corner. It was past midnight, and there were few people about, but he looked into the face of every woman he passed, and spoke to one or two.

At last he turned from the broad street into a smaller and narrower one. Here his progress became slower, and he seemed to be counting the numbers as he went. The

street was narrow, and the houses were old and high and dark. In front of many of them a red lamp was burning. A stranger would have felt by instinct that he had found his way into one of the lowest parts of the city. There was something gruesome in the grim silence behind that row of red lamps.

Unsteadily, and with frequent pauses, John Peters made his way several hundred yards down the street. Then suddenly he lurched up against a sort of double door, which gave at once to his weight, and he staggered into a sanded parlour. A man with blank, unseeing eyes sat playing a miserable piano; a woman in a gaudy red dress lounged upon a sofa. From an inner room a man came hastily out.

John Peters for a moment was a different person. He stood upright, and his voice, though low, seemed to cut the air like a whip. "Make room for me on the sofa, girl! More of the women, Johann! Close up behind, I am being followed. Let no one leave the place."

The man disappeared, and almost immediately the lights went out in the room beyond. The woman on the sofa moved her skirts and made room for the newcomer by her side. From the door on the left two others entered, gaudily dressed, their faces disfigured with paint and powder. No one said a word, but all the time the jingle of the piano continued, and the man who sat on the stool,

deaf to all that was going on, ground out his wretched music. The girl on the sofa, who was leaning a little toward the street as though listening, held up her hand suddenly. The footsteps had halted outside the door. She burst into a loud laugh, and threw her arm without a moment's hesitation around her companion's neck. One of the other women began to dance; from the inner room a wretched-looking waiter came hurrying out with wine and glasses upon a tray. The outer door was pushed open, and a man made his way in.

He was tall, rather shabbily dressed, and his face was insignificant except for his eyes, which seemed in that first moment to flash round the room. He was smoking a large cigar, which he removed from his mouth; and he took off his hat with a sweeping bow. "I trust," he said, "that I am not intruding. Some very good friends of mine have been here before."

One of the girls laughed at him, and taking his arm led him toward a chair.

The man leaned forward in his chair and looked across the room, as though to see more distinctly the girl on the sofa. In reality it was her companion at whom he was looking, and whose eyes met his in a drunken, dissolute stare. John Peters was certainly not looking at his best. His face was flushed, his dress and hair disordered; there was a red light in his eyes, too,

which the stranger saw and did not like. He turned back to the girl who sat by his side. "You would like some wine?" he said. "You shall have it. Call the waiter and order whatever you like."

John Peters rose unsteadily to his feet. Standing in the middle of the sanded floor, he banged a chair upon the ground, and called loudly for Johann. The man who had first appeared came from the inner room, and stood before him silently.

"Look here, Johann," John Peters cried, "have n't I told you before when I come to honour your dirty café I will not have these infernal strangers prying around. No wonder everyone in the city talks about me. Why can't you keep the place private, you dolt!"

The man held out his hand as though in protest. "Sir," he muttered under his breath, "it is a stranger; he came here by accident. If you talk like this he will hear you. He will guess who you are."

"What do I care if he knows?" John Peters cried. "What do I care if all the city knows what I do, and where I choose to spend my time. I am here to get drunk, and I mean to get drunk, and if that man" — he advanced a step toward the stranger — "thinks he knows who I am, or if he has come here to find out who I am, I 'd as soon wring his neck as drink a bottle of wine with you, Johann."

The stranger half rose to his feet. John Peters was looking dangerous.

"Sir," he said, "I do not wish to quarrel. If I am an intruder here I will go away; but I understood that it was a public place, and that I had as much right here as any one else."

The man named Johann came between them. He was beginning to understand his cue. "Gentlemen," he said, "do not quarrel; for the love of Heaven do not quarrel. If the police come I shall be ruined. There was a complaint against me last week, and I shall have to go before the magistrates. If you please, sir."

He held out his hand and tried to push John Peters back, but he was brushed away as though he had been a fly. The stranger and John Peters were standing now face to face.

"Sir," John Peters cried, his tone a little husky, and swaying unsteadily upon his feet, "I want to ask you a question, and you have got to answer it. The — the truth, mind, no damned lies for me. Do you know who I am?"

"I have no idea," the man answered slowly.

"Do you want to know?" John Peters demanded.

"I have no curiosity," the stranger answered.

John Peters leaned over and struck him lightly across the cheek. "You are a liar!" he cried. "You followed me here; I heard your footsteps behind me. Wherever I go some one follows me, and then all these dirty Republican

papers fill their pages with lies about my doings. If I thought you were one of them I 'd wring your neck."

The man had stepped a little back, with his hand to his cheek where John Peters had struck him. His left hand was slowly travelling toward his inside pocket. John Peters watched him for a moment, and then suddenly seized it. With a cry of pain the man dropped the revolver which he had just drawn.

"Now I know you 're a spy," John Peters cried. "Lock the door, Johann. I am going to teach him the lesson of his life."

The man began to shake. There was something terrible in the grip of John Peters's hands upon his shoulders. He knew very well that whether his assailant was drunk or sober, he was only a child in his hands.

"I am only doing my duty," he faltered. "Let me go, and I will tell you who I am."

"We will see about that," John Peters answered. "You lied to me just now when you told me that you did not know who I was?"

"I did," the man answered sullenly.

John Peters shook him softly, but even so the man's teeth seemed to rattle in his head. "Who am I, then?" he asked. "Tell them all, tell the girls and Johann. Who am I?"

"The truth?" the man gasped.

"The truth, unless you want choking," was the answer.

"You are John Valentine, Crown Prince of Bergeland," the man faltered.

"It is the first word of truth you have spoken," John Peters answered. "You need n't look around you. You have n't surprised any one. They all know me here except that mummy at the piano, and he 's deaf and blind. Now, then, who set you spying upon me?"

"I am not a spy," the man declared. "I am told off to follow you to see that you do not get into trouble."

John Peters laughed for a moment, and swayed on his feet unsteadily. "You mean that you 're a Government spy, one of Bernhardt's creatures?" he asked.

"It is the baron himself," the man answered, "who set me on to watch you. I have only to find out where you go, and to see that you do not get into trouble."

John Peters turned to the waiter. "Bring a bottle of wine," he ordered. "We will drink to the health of this excellent police commissioner, who looks so well after his master. Glasses for everyone. There, you see, I let you go," he added, relinquishing his hold upon his captive, "but if you had been spying on me for one of those infernal Republican papers, I 'd as soon have wrung your neck as looked at you. Drink, man, here 's health to Bernhardt, the best and shrewdest police commissioner in Europe.

You can go back and tell him about this. Tell him that we drank his health."

The man moved toward the door, but John Peters changed his mind. "No," he said, "we 'll go together. Sit down and talk to that young lady. We must finish this bottle, and then you shall see me home. A shrewd fellow, Bernhardt. I am not sure — that I don't need some one to look after me to-night."

He sank back upon the sofa. His hand caught hold of the girl's, and instantly he felt something passed into it, which was transferred to his pocket, and all the time he swayed slightly as he sat, and held the glass to his lips, over which his eyes were fixed steadily upon the other man. The girl looked at him in swift admiration. He was wonderful! The man at the piano turned round and bowed his thanks, with the glass of wine which had been handed to him still in his hand. He recommenced to play, and John Peters, with a laugh, staggered to his feet and danced clumsily round with the girl in his arms. "Dance, you fool," he cried to the stranger. "What do you come here for but to enjoy yourself! Dance!"

The man did as he was told. He was still pale with fear. John Peters leaned against the wall and roared at his clumsy efforts.

"Go on, man," he cried. "Why, I 'd sooner see you dance than the Celestine women. Look at him, Rosa, how

he picks his feet up. Johann, send for a cab; I am tired, I am going home."

The man bowed, and in a few minutes a clumsy, old-fashioned vehicle drew up outside. John Peters passed his arm through the other man's, and they left the place together. With a crack of the whip the carriage rattled off along the cobbled street. John Peters took off his hat.

"It makes one feel a little giddy," he explained. "Listen, you fellow, what 's your name?"

"Herrmann," the man answered.

"Then listen, Herrmann," he said, "you tell our friend Bernhardt that you spent the evening with me, and that I say you 're a jolly good sort. Tell him to send you out every night to follow me about. I like it. We 'll have some rare times together. I know all the places to go to enjoy yourself. So I ought, eh? My own city, you know. Where do you want to get out? The park corner? Tell the coachman. I am going to sleep. Stay, you 'd better stop and see that I get safely back to the palace."

He leaned back in the carriage and, with his hands in his pockets, closed his eyes and began to snore. His companion opened the door of the carriage softly and jumped out. In a moment or two John Peters sat up and shook himself. "Bernhardt is a fool," he said softly to himself, "but it looks as though at last he were beginning to suspect."

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN PETERS rose in his stirrups, and with his right hand to his mouth, sent forth a shout which travelled across the open plain like the report of a cannon. Even the cows grazing by the riverside looked up; a man who lay upon some sacks of grain, floating down the canal on a flat-bottomed boat, woke up with a start, and nearly overbalanced himself in his desire to see this disturber of the early morning's peace. And the man for whose benefit the shout was given, wheeled his horse abruptly round and waited.

John Peters touched his great bay mare with the spurs, and galloped across the open country. The mud flew up behind him, the very ground seemed to tremble with the thunder of his horse's hoofs. Notwithstanding his height, he rode erect, and with the sure, graceful seat of a born horseman. Bernhardt, who rode a cob, and was not at his best in the saddle, watched him approach with admiration.

"Where have you sprung from?" he called out, as John Peters drew near. "Why this amazing energy?"

"I have come to join you in your morning ride," John

Peters answered. "Somehow I fancied that we could talk better here than in your grubby office, and I have a few things to say to you, my friend Bernhardt."

"You came in search of me, then?"

"Why not? It is pleasanter to talk out here, and one is sure of not being overheard."

The two men rode side by side at a walking pace. John Peters, with his great stature, and on his magnificent horse, towered over the other man, who seemed like a child upon a pony.

"Look here," John Peters said, "have you been to your office this morning, Bernhardt?"

The other shook his head. "I left home at half-past six," he replied. "My energy does not go so far."

"Well, when you do you will probably find one of your night-birds anxious to make a report to you. I caught the brute shadowing me last night."

Bernhardt smiled pleasantly. "Then you were not so drunk as usual," he remarked.

"I am never so drunk," John Peters answered, "as not to see what is going on around me. Fortunately, I was in one of my good humours, or your report would have come from a hospital."

"I am sorry," Bernhardt said, "if he annoyed you."

John Peters looked down at his companion with darkening face. "Look here," he said, "I want to

know by what right you dare to have me followed and a record made of my movements. It is a dirty trick, Bernhardt."

Bernhardt shook his head. "No," he said, "it is not that. The Prince of Bergeland cannot be allowed to go unprotected into every low haunt of the city. In my department there is no such thing as curiosity. You have been watched because you are Crown Prince of Bergeland."

John Peters leaned a little down in his saddle. His riding-whip rested between the ears of Bernhardt's horse.

"Is that the truth?" he asked.

"It is," Bernhardt answered smoothly.

"Is it the whole truth?" John Peters persisted.

Bernhardt sat for a moment immovable in the saddle. His eyes were fixed apparently upon the glittering mass of spires and domes and chimneys, where, a few miles ahead, the city spread itself out.

"Does anyone ever tell the whole truth?" he asked quietly.

John Peters bent down once more, and the flash in his eyes spoke of a purpose. "You," he said, "are going to tell me the whole truth — now. I demand it. What have you in your mind, that you set spies to dog my movements?"

Bernhardt smiled quietly. He looked up at his

companion. "I will tell you," he said, "one thing that is in my mind. I believe that if you would give me your entire confidence, if you would trust me as man to man, that we might yet save this country."

John Peters was sure now of the thing which he had suspected. He looked at his companion thoughtfully. How much did he know? How much? He looked away at the canal by the side of which they were riding.

"You seem to imagine," John Peters said, "that I have secrets."

"Who has not?" Bernhardt answered.

John Peters laughed, laughed with no affected merriment, but with real boisterous mirth. "Ah, my dear Bernhardt," he declared, "you are a great man, you read me like a book. I am a child in your hands! I confess, then, that it is true. I have a secret."

"I am very sure of it," Bernhardt answered quietly. "I am also sure that you do not mean to tell it to me."

"If I did," John Peters declared, "you would not believe me."

"Why not?" Bernhardt answered. "One can believe strange things of a man like you, who stands to Bergeland, the country over which he should one day rule, for the last word in dissipation, who flaunts his debauches in the eyes of the people, who frequents the low dens of the city, and yet rides at six o'clock in the morning with the

complexion and colour of a boy, with a hand as steady as a rock and an eye as clear as a child's."

"All constitution, my friend," John Peters announced. "I am as strong as a horse, too. Why don't you enroll me as an honourary member of your force, and put me on the track of the chief of the Watchers? I 'd soon account for him."

"There are words spoken in jest which savour often of the truth," Bernhardt remarked. "I have come to the conclusion that the gentleman in question must have some very powerful friends."

"You are rather good at coming to conclusions," John Peters remarked, "and meanwhile the cord is drawn a little tighter, and the country slips away from us. I tell you frankly I 'm off to Paris in a few days. I don't believe this place is going to be good for my health."

Bernhardt looked at him curiously. "There 's no hurry for a few days," he said, "not, at any rate, until after Parliament has met."

"Even your spies," John Peters said dryly, "get hold of wrong information sometimes. I don't mind telling you, Bernhardt, that I don't like the attitude of the people. They glower so as one passes, and very seldom salute."

"You have never given them much encouragement," Bernhardt remarked. "I have seen you ride through the

city often, and I have never seen you return a single greeting. His Majesty himself is not genial, but you act as though your only idea was to incense the people."

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. "My infernal honesty, I suppose," he remarked. "I 'm hanged if I can bow and smirk like a shopman. What the dickens is this? An escort come for you?"

They were still riding by the side of the canal, but they had left the open country behind, and were fast approaching the town. Already they had passed several large factories and rows of workingmen's cottages, and the meadow-path had given way to a cinder-track. Just in front of them was a lock and a bridge, on which were drawn up some fifteen or twenty policemen.

"Not exactly," Bernhardt answered. "I had them stationed there, however. Would you be interested to know why?"

John Peters nodded. He was looking down the canal.

"There is something," Bernhardt continued, "which has been bothering me for months, and that is how arms are being smuggled into Bergeland. We know that it is being done, but though the railways and roads have been thoroughly watched, we have never discovered a single case. It occurred to me that they might come this way. I am going to have all the barges searched to-day."

"My friend, you are marvellous," John Peters declared. "You think of everything, but I cannot see any barges."

"There will be plenty during the day," Bernhardt answered. "I shall wait here for a little time."

John Peters nodded. "In which case," he said, "*au revoir*. Shall we see you at the palace later?"

"I have an appointment with his Majesty at eleven o'clock," Bernhardt answered.

John Peters nodded, and stopping for a moment to light a cigarette, rode slowly off. Directly he had passed a bend in the road, however, he touched his horse with the spurs, and cantered along until he came to a small inn and beer-garden. Here he dismounted quickly and entered the place. A man was standing behind the counter, who stared at his visitor in amazement.

"I wish to use the telephone," John Peters said. "What is the number of the lock-house below Tratchen?"

Still staring, the man told him. John Peters entered the telephone box, and was there for about five minutes. When he reappeared, he produced his pocketbook and counted out some money.

"Step into your parlour with me for a moment," John Peters said to the man, whose eyes were already glistening. "I should like a few minutes' conversation with you."

The man threw open the door and John Peters followed him in. In less than five minutes they reappeared. The

visitor mounted his horse and rode away. The host of the inn stood like a man dazed for several moments. Then he poured himself out a glass of brandy and tossed it off. He had scarcely done so when Bernhardt entered.

"You had a gentleman here to use the telephone five minutes ago," he said brusquely.

"It is very true," the man admitted.

"What number did he ring up?" Bernhardt demanded.

The man hesitated. "We do not tell those things," he said; "it is against the rule."

"You will have to tell me," Bernhardt declared. "I am Baron Bernhardt, chief of the police. Two of my men are outside if you doubt my word."

The man began to shake. "But, sir," he said, "I will tell you willingly. It was a very tall gentleman, and—I am sure that he was mad. He rang up the palace, the king's palace, and gave orders for a breakfast to be ready in half an hour."

"Is that all?" Bernhardt asked.

"Every word," the man affirmed. "I hope there will be no trouble."

Bernhardt turned on his heel. "No, there will be no trouble," he said. "The gentleman had a right to ring up the palace if he wished to. He was the crown prince."

The man gasped with astonishment. It was a wonderful morning!

CHAPTER XVII

HER visitor had come, then — punctual to the second. Grace looked up from her book with beating heart.

"Come in!" she said.

A tall figure, wrapped in a long military cloak, entered. Grace rose to her feet. The room was a small one, and his first step had brought them within a few feet of each other. Whatever greeting may have been on her lips died away. For his part, he made no attempt at speech. If he felt any surprise at all, he concealed it marvellously. Grace, on the other hand, was taken too utterly by surprise to conceal her emotions. She stared at him with wide-open, terrified eyes.

"You!" she faltered incredulously. "I don't understand."

He laid his hat upon the table. "You must remember," he said, "that I am at home here, and that Varia is, after all, a small town compared with London. Strangers come here, and it is soon known, especially just now when the city is disturbed. Are you surprised that I should come to bid you welcome?"

Her hand touched her forehead. Her perplexity was almost pitiful. "I was not expecting you," she murmured.

"Naturally," he answered, "and you were expecting some one else. I gathered that when I made inquiries below. Nevertheless, I hope I shall not be in the way for a few minutes. I will go directly the more privileged person arrives."

"I have an appointment at three o'clock," she said uneasily. "I think that the person who is coming will expect to find me alone."

"Then ring the bell and tell the waiter that he is to be shown into another room for a moment, while I escape," John Peters said. "I am here, and I am going to claim a few minutes of your time."

She did as she was told. There was a masterful ring in the man's tone, from which it was hard to escape. Then he came up to her and before she could stop him took her hands firmly in his own.

"Listen," he said, "you have walked into the lion's den. This is my own city, which has no laws for me — a tyrant and a libertine, according to that charming little Republican journal which I saw upon your table. You are in my power, you see, and you must obey my orders."

She smiled very faintly. She did not look in the least terrified. "Well, we will see," she answered.

"Sit down in that chair," he said, "and tell me the meaning of that ridiculous scene in your room in London."

She covered her face with her hands. He leaned over and drew them away.

"I have not come here to reproach you," he said quietly. "I can quite understand a great many people having a perfectly justifiable desire to see me dead. But you — how came you among them?"

"I cannot answer that question," she said. "You must know that I cannot!"

He nodded. "Loyalty to friends, and all that sort of thing, I suppose," he remarked. "I should n't wonder, even, if you belonged to some secret society pledged to exterminate the tyrants of the earth with bowstring, poison, or bombs. In that case I could n't, of course, expect you to tell me anything about it."

"Don't jest," she begged, with a little catch in her throat.

"I cannot help it," he answered. "There is something about a secret society which always appeals to my sense of humour. They do seem hopelessly out of date, don't they? We don't need them in Bergeland, you will be pleased to hear. The Republicans are allowed to talk all the treason they like in Parliament. They are proposing, I believe, to give my uncle a week's notice when they meet again."

"Will he go?" she asked anxiously.

"I think not," John Peters answered. "You see, he is an obstinate old man, and there is the army!"

"I wish," she said, "that you would go, and he, and leave the country for those who are more fit to govern it."

He laughed quietly. It was always rather a pleasant sight to see John Peters laugh. The deep lines seemed smoothed out of his face, the hard mouth was relaxed, he seemed years younger. "Well," he said, "I cannot answer for my uncle, but, on certain conditions, I will go myself — presently."

"What are they?" she asked eagerly.

Again she felt her hands clasped.

"That you go with me, wherever it may be."

She snatched her hands away and rose to her feet. "I think," she said, pointing to the door, "that you had better go."

He, too, rose and stood by her side, masterful, intense. Her eyes flashed scorn upon him, but her heart grew weak, and she felt her strength melting away. There were none of the things which she had feared to see in his face. It was a man's countenance. It seemed honest. Her brain ran riot with horrible memories of the stories she had heard. It was he — the hero of a thousand scandals — who was daring to make love to her.

"No," he said, "I don't think that I will — just yet. Grace," he added, in a lower tone, "I could never ask you

to be Princess of Bergeland, but if you would be — Mrs. John Peters!"

"Do I understand," she asked, "that you want me to marry you?"

"Certainly," he answered, "in which case I should remain — Mr. John Peters."

"Do you remember," she asked, "the last time we met?"

"Certainly," he answered. "I am not likely to forget it. You had other callers, and I rather thought there was going to be a row."

"I said the last time," she repeated. "I mean a week, no, ten days ago."

He raised his eyebrows. "Pardon me," he said, "but I do not understand."

A shade of anger stole into her face. "You are not blessed with a good memory," she remarked. "Perhaps you do not remember meeting me on my way from the theatre, and coming up to my rooms?"

"When did you say this was?" he asked quietly.

She thought for a moment. "A week last Saturday," she answered. "You wore a heavy fur coat, and you were not looking quite so well as you do now."

John Peters was looking very serious indeed. "I met you on the way from the theatre? I came up to your rooms?" he repeated slowly.

"Exactly. And you did not ask me to marry you!"

"I don't think," he said slowly, "that I was quite myself that afternoon."

"I came to the same conclusion," she admitted.

He smiled at her suddenly. "Dear Grace," he said softly, "don't visit upon me anything that wretched fellow said or did. I am one of those unfortunate persons who are cursed with a dual personality. Be kind to me, and I promise that you shall never see anything of that other one."

She held out her hands to keep him away. "Oh! it is all so impossible," she declared, "so utterly impossible. Besides ——"

"Besides what?" he asked.

"You don't really mean it," she faltered.

He took her in his arms — her resistance was very faint indeed. "Dear Grace," he whispered, "give me a chance to prove that I do mean it. Go back to England to-morrow. Don't stay here. Things are going to happen, and you are better out of the way. I will come to you before long. I swear it. And when I once leave Bergeland I shall never return, never; that is to say, unless I do so as Mr. John Peters."

"Oh! I wish I could," she murmured helplessly.

He released her for a moment and looked into her face. A scarlet flush had stolen into her cheeks, there were tears in her eyes. She was distractingly beautiful.

"I quite forgot," he said smiling. "You are a conspirator yourself, are n't you? Perhaps that is why you are here."

"Don't!" she begged.

"Take my advice, little woman," he said seriously, "and run away home. I will let you into a state secret. The revolutionists in this country are too strong to need any help. They have got us in the hollow of their hand. If my old fool of an uncle insists upon using the military, we shall be swept out of the country for all time before a month is gone by."

"And you?" she asked.

"I shall take care that I am swept toward London," he answered, smiling.

She looked up at him half tearfully. "I do wish that I could understand you," she said. "You spoke to me just now of a dual personality. I am quite sure that there are two of you. There is the Mr. Peters whom I met at St. Moritz, at the Savoy, and now; and there is the man who almost insulted me the other day, the man whose name is a byword for dissipation in every city of Europe."

John Peters nodded. "We are rather a bad lot, I am afraid," he admitted, "but, Grace dear, I promise you this: Be a brave little woman, trust me, and you shall never see anything of the wrong John Peters. He shall perish with the kingdom of Bergeland. John Peters,

the commoner, shall make you the best husband woman ever had."

"You dear!" she murmured softly, "and yet it 's all so ridiculous, you know. I 'm waiting at the present moment for — your greatest enemy."

John Peters smiled. "Now I wonder who that might be?" he said. "I should suggest myself."

She shook her head.

"I know," he continued; "you are waiting for the First Watcher."

The colour fled from her cheeks. John Peters looked thoughtfully out of the window.

"Why should I," he said softly, "not wait with you? They tell us that we have only to lay hands upon him and the revolution collapses."

"You can do that if you will," she said simply, "but in that case I can never return to England."

"Fortunately," he remarked, turning away from the window, "I am not at all sure that I want the revolution to collapse. If only I can keep my old idiot of an uncle out of trouble."

"He deserves anything that could happen to him," she said severely. "He is a very wicked old man, quite unfit to rule over any country of free men and women."

"I entirely agree with you," John Peters said, "but what about myself?"

"I don't believe half what people say," she declared, "and you 're going to be better now, anyway."

He took her into his arms and kissed her. "It 's a promise," he said. "When will you come out with me and see the sights?"

"Do you think it would be wise?" she asked.

He laughed. "Wise or not, you are coming," he said. "I shall call for you at half-past ten to-morrow morning. If I meet our friend on the stairs, I 'll hurry him up."

She shuddered, and withdrew from his embrace. "If you only knew!" she murmured, as he passed out.

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE was a ball and reception at the palace that night, and notwithstanding the fast approaching political crisis, the rooms were thronged with people. The old king himself received; the crown prince, glorious in the full-dress uniform of the Bergian Guards, stood for a time at his right hand. After midnight, however, the pedestal was deserted, and John Peters, followed by some of his suite, strolled through the rooms. With a faint smile of amusement he noticed the mothers and chaperons gathering in their flocks with anxious care as he passed. He turned with a smile to one of his followers.

"My dear Albert," he said, "after all, it is you who are the fortunate one. Not one of these old ladies but would smile graciously if you asked her daughter to dance. A similar request from me, and she would go into hysterics."

The man addressed curled his moustache and brought his spurs together, as he bowed to a passing couple. "Perhaps so, your Highness," he answered, "but it is a great reputation, yours. Do you notice how all the young married women watch you out of the corners of their eyes?"

"I do not find that amusing," John Peters declared, "for I have only to ask one of them to dance, and I make an enemy for life of her husband."

"Still," the young man declared covetously, "it is a glorious reputation."

John Peters smiled a little queerly. He found much in life to amuse him. "Come," he said, "one must get a little fun to atone for all that one misses. I shall ask the child of the Baroness de Holdt to dance. Stand here and watch, my young friend."

John Peters stopped before a corpulent lady in black velvet, and all ablaze with diamonds. She rose at once, but he held out a protesting hand.

"Do not disturb yourself, I beg, dear Baroness," he said. "I am glad to see you here. Permit me to congratulate you upon the appearance of your daughter. She is quite charming."

The baroness received the compliment with obvious disquietude. The child by her side, a slim, fair-haired little thing dressed in white, lifted her large eyes adoringly to the crown prince, and dropped them with a vivid blush.

"The young men are scarce to-night, I am sure," John Peters said, "or I should find them here. Permit me, mademoiselle, the pleasure of a turn."

The child rose with shy pleasure. The young captain,

who was standing by, watched with delight the almost frantic despair of the baroness.

"It is a great honour, your Highness, but my daughter is not well — she does not dance yet."

John Peters was suddenly deaf. He passed out of the room with the child clinging to his arm in shy pleasure, and entered the dancing-salon, where every one made way. Twice, three times, they went round, John Peters looking down with a smile of amusement into the flushed, happy face of the girl, who was thoroughly enjoying this, the proudest moment of her life. Then, as the dance finished, John Peters calmly led his partner out by the door opposite the one by which the baroness was making frantic efforts to attract her daughter's attention.

"I think," she said hesitatingly, "that my mother wants me."

"No doubt," he answered coolly, "but your mother can have you for the rest of your life. The next five minutes belong to me."

He led her to a quiet corner. The other loiterers melted respectfully away. The child's heart began to beat fast. She was alone with this terribly wicked, wonderfully handsome man. What delightful excitement! Would he kiss her, she wondered. She lifted her eyes to his and hoped so, desperately.

"Is this your first dance, child?" he asked.

His tone was kind, but there were not the things in it which she had expected.

"My second," she answered shyly. "I came to the last one, but I like this much better."

He laughed at her genially. "I hope," he said, "that you will come to many more."

"And dance with your Highness again?" she asked, looking up at him.

His face was suddenly serious. "Ah, little girl, that I cannot say," he answered. "Only I hope that very soon you will find some one to dance with you who will make you a good husband, as you will make him a good wife. A great chapter of the history of this country will be lived during the next few months," he added, turning toward her with a grave smile, "and much of her future greatness will depend upon her young men and young women. You girls especially can do so much. Always remember that the life of a country is as the life of her citizens. Will you try what you can do?"

"I will try," she promised, looking at him with shining eyes.

"You are such a child," he said, smiling at her, "and you have the right to amuse yourself. Only remember that, underneath, life has graver purposes. Our country needs her sons and daughters to remember this just now. Here comes your mother, looking somewhat disturbed."

The baroness, considerably flustered, approached them nervously, defying etiquette in her great anxiety. John Peters rose from his place. "I resign your daughter, madam," he said, with twinkling eyes, "to your anxious care. Mademoiselle, I thank you for your dance, and for the pleasure of your conversation."

He left them with a low bow. The baroness looked into her daughter's shining eyes and trembled. "Sophie," she exclaimed, "did he, did he try to make love to you?"

"I don't think you would call it that," the child answered with a demure smile.

"He did n't even try to kiss you?"

She shook her head. "He did n't show the least desire to," she answered. "I — I wish he had!"

The baroness sank down with relief upon the couch, relief mingled with just displeasure at her daughter's last speech. "How dare you say such a thing, Sophie!" she exclaimed. "If you only knew what sort of a man he is!"

The child looked up at her mother and smiled. "That is just what I don't think people do know, mother," she answered. "If any one ever dares to say anything against him before me, I shall count him my enemy."

John Peters walked on and made his way through the throng, which opened respectfully to let him pass, until he

found the man he sought. "Bernhardt," he said, touching him on the shoulder, "we will drink a bottle of wine together."

"Your Royal Highness is very kind," Bernhardt answered.

They found a corner in the reserved portion of the buffet.

"Tell me," John Peters asked, "did you have any luck this morning?"

Bernhardt shook his head. "No," he answered. "Their cursed spies must be everywhere. A dozen barges were all unloaded a few locks down, and the contents spirited away somewhere."

John Peters sipped his wine. "You don't seem fortunate lately, do you?" he remarked.

Bernhardt opened his lips, but, remembering in whose presence he was, remained silent.

John Peters only smiled. "Swear away, my friend," he said. "If it makes you feel any better, don't mind me. I 'm not sure that it is n't I who ought to be doing the swearing, though. The rifles which you have failed to capture are probably destined to empty their bullets at these windows."

"I trust that it will never come to that," Bernhardt answered gloomily.

John Peters laughed. "But you know very well that it will," he remarked, "and so do I. We jest together, you

and I, Bernhardt, but we know that the kingdom of Bergeland is doomed."

"Internally," Bernhardt answered, "I do believe that we are in a serious state. But there remains one factor which you and I have never discussed."

"The army," John Peters said quickly.

"No. That!" Bernhardt answered, leaning forward and pointing with a silent gesture through the parted curtains, out into the great hall.

John Peters leaned a little to one side, and followed his companion's finger with anxious eyes. Upon the raised dais the king still sat, and by his side the German ambassador.

"I should prefer," he said softly, "a republic."

Bernhardt shrugged his shoulders. "We should at least rule ourselves," he remarked, "but I am very sure of one thing. If German troops once cross the frontier of Bergeland, they will never leave it."

John Peters rose. "I will go and join in that little conference," he said. "I have no fancy for Prince de Suess."

CHAPTER XIX

THE king welcomed his nephew with unusual cordiality. His long, lean face was a little flushed, and his eyes were unnaturally bright. "The prince and I, John," he said, "have been having a most interesting conversation. Come and join us."

John Peters exchanged cold greetings with the man whom he cordially disliked, and sank down upon the couch.

"His Majesty," the prince said, turning to John Peters, "like all of us, is somewhat disturbed over the recent elections and the great Republican gains throughout the country. I took the liberty of reminding him that we in Germany were once placed in a somewhat similar position. We had for one session a parliament which practically contained a revolutionist majority. It was no use making a fuss. We simply sat tight, and the emperor vetoed every measure which he felt was inimical to the interests of the country. A crisis arose, there was a dissolution and a fresh election. It was at a time when we were on indifferent terms with a great power, and the nation did not hesitate. There was a clean sweep of the

revolutionists. To-day in our country they are scarcely a power to be reckoned with."

"That is all very well, my dear prince," John Peters said, "but you must remember that your emperor held the winning card all the time. The army was his, and against it the people were powerless."

"It is the same with us," the king declared. "The army is loyal. Grobener has staked his honour upon it."

"Even if Grobener is not too sanguine," John Peters said, "what is our army? Seven to ten thousand men against half a million. Besides, we don't want to see our streets and squares run red with the blood of our own people. The German army was too mighty a force ever to be resisted. If it came to a crisis the people would certainly go for ours."

"I think, my dear sir," the ambassador said suavely, "that you exaggerate the Republican spirit in your country. But remember that, in case of need, we could march a hundred thousand men over your frontier with half an hour's notice."

"But would you do it?" the king asked eagerly.

The prince smiled. "Why not? The one thing my master hates is a republic, and he is not likely to tolerate one as a neighbour. His help would be yours in time of emergency."

"The day a German soldier sets foot on Bergian soil in

fighting trim," John Peters declared, "will be the beginning of the end of this country. The nation which employs mercenaries to fight her battles is indeed at her last gasp."

Prince de Suess rose a little stiffly. "The troops of a friendly country, your Royal Highness," he said, "who would probably be required to do no more than demonstrate, can scarcely be termed mercenaries. However, we will let the matter end here. I trust that the necessity for resuming this conversation may never occur."

The ambassador bowed and took his leave. The king, with a heavy frown upon his thick eyebrows, turned toward his nephew.

"You are a fool, John," he said angrily. "You have sent away angry the man who might have proved our salvation."

John Peters laughed softly as he rose to his feet. "Did you ever hear of Germany doing an unselfish action?" he asked. "If she saved us from being robbed of our kingdom by our own people, it would be so that she could the easier grab it for herself. Here comes the doctor to remind you that you are sitting up late. I want to see Bernhardt again for a moment."

He found Bernhardt where he had left him, and subsided into his old seat. "I want to ask you something,

Bernhardt," he said. "When I came back from England a short time ago, do you remember my telling you about a little adventure I had there?"

"Perfectly," Bernhardt answered. "I have been making some most interesting inquiries."

"Find out anything?"

"Yes," Bernhardt answered. "I found out that the police of Vienna and Paris and Berlin were all keen on the scent, besides the Londoners. I could tell you of seven assassinations which are supposed to have been committed under the auspices of our friends. It is a society for the extermination of tyrants. There are three men and one woman member of every country, and the leader of the movement in England is a highly philanthropic tradesman and a member of Parliament. They all aid and abet one another in these removals, as they call them, and they do it so well that so far they have never even been nearly caught. A good many of them are absolutely known, but there is n't a scrap of evidence against anybody. It is curious you should mention this matter just now."

"Why?" John Peters asked.

"Because," Bernhardt answered, "I have just received an intimation from London that a person connected with this enterprise is in Varia to-day."

John Peters smiled thoughtfully. "Wonderful, this

police system," he remarked. "Is it a man or a woman who has come?"

Bernhardt smiled. "Woman," he answered, "tall, dark, handsome. Here under her own name, Grace Pellisier. Staying with her maid at the Hotel Bergman. Was visited this afternoon by — whom do you think?"

"I am fascinated," John Peters declared, "go on."

"By His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Bergeland," Bernhardt said.

John Peters leaned back in his seat. "I am dumbfounded," he declared. "Bernhardt, you are marvellous. You have eyes everywhere. I am afraid of you!"

"And I of your sarcasm," Bernhardt answered grimly. "Never mind, your Royal Highness. Even we blabbing policemen don't tell everything. Some little thoughts we keep at the back of our heads."

John Peters smiled as he rose. "If that means that you do not tell me everything, Bernhardt, I think that you are very unkind," he said. "I shall not stay with you any longer. I shall go and talk with the young lady from England."

He moved away. Bernhardt rose up swiftly with a little exclamation. He saw John Peters go through the opening into the great hall, and bow low before an elderly lady of distinguished appearance.

"Dear Madame de Sayers," he said, "I am sure I am not mistaken in your companion. Surely I have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Pellisier act in London."

Madame de Sayers turned toward her companion, and would have presented her, but John Peters hastily intervened.

"Let us banish such formalities," he said, smiling. "I think myself that royalty should be presented to the artist, not the artist to royalty! I consider that Miss Pellisier and I are already friends, for I have seen her at the theatre. I congratulate you, young lady," he added with a smile, "upon a kingdom more stable than mine, I fear, will ever be."

Grace only bowed. It was Madame de Sayers who replied.

"I trust your Highness's words are spoken in jest," she said gravely.

"Always in jest, madame," he answered smiling. "Is that not my reputation? Will Miss Pellisier permit me to take her to the supper-room? Albert," he said, turning round to one of his suite, "Madame de Sayers will do you the honour."

They moved off. Grace carried herself erect, with a slight but unusual flush upon her cheeks. She wore a dress of dove-coloured silk, which shimmered as she walked, and a string of pearls hung from her neck. There

was no woman in the room of more distinguished appearance, and every one stared at the couple in respectful wonder as they made way.

"I am terribly afraid of you," Grace declared, as they entered the supper-room. "I have never seen you like this except at a distance. How often ought I to call you 'your Royal Highness'?"

"Every sentence," he answered, smiling, "but I 'll let you call me 'John' instead."

"I am overcome," she murmured.

"Have a try," he suggested encouragingly. "It 's quite an easy name."

She shook her head. "If ever I did," she said, "it would have to be when you were not so gorgeous."

He looked down at himself — a blaze of blue and gold and white, with jewelled orders and gilded lace. "I do look rather well in these things, don't I?" he remarked, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes. "It is the only thing I shall regret — I mean that John Peters will regret. And Mrs. John, too, perhaps?"

"You 'll never look half so nice in ordinary clothes," she admitted, "but ——"

"But what?" he whispered.

"You 'll look more like John Peters."

Some supper was placed before them, and wine in gold cups. She handled hers with mock reverence. "I can

never drink out of it," she declared. "Are we supposed to, really?"

"It 's your last chance," he answered. "The Republicans are going to melt them down to pay off the arrears of the education bill. By the by, how did you come to be here with Madame de Sayers?"

"You were surprised?" she asked, smiling.

"A little," he admitted. "Madame de Sayers seemed such a queer companion for a red-hot Republican like you. By the by, do you know that that champagne is paid for by a groaning democracy?"

"It tastes very good," she answered. "I came with Madame de Sayers because she happens to be my aunt."

It was his turn to be surprised. He looked at her for a moment and set down his glass. "Then you are half Bergian!" he exclaimed.

She nodded. "Madame de Sayers and my mother were sisters," she said.

"It is quite extraordinary," he declared. "Your aunt comes from one of the oldest and most aristocratic families in the country."

"I suppose," she said, "I am the inevitable reaction. But if I wanted to be spiteful, I might remind you of our conversations at St. Moritz."

"There is republicanism and republicanism," he answered. "There is the logical desire of a man to stand

upon his own feet and live his own life, and there is the misguided unrest which breeds Nihilists and secret societies, which turns out thousands and thousands of parasitical creatures who are nothing but a blot upon the earth. They would win by sickening crime what God in his good time ——"

John Peters broke off in his sentence and sprang to his feet. Grace swayed for a moment in her chair and then staggered up. A low rumbling, like the beginning of a thunder-storm, was followed by a loud report, and then another. John Peters caught his companion by the wrist and dragged her to the door.

CHAPTER XX

THE scene out in the great hall was one of wild confusion. In the middle and toward the upper end the terrified women were all huddled together, shrieking. From the south side, the great glass windows had been blown out, and one could see distinctly across the corridor and entrance hall, to where a breach had been made in the outer wall of the palace itself. Little puffs of smoke were coming in, and a curious red glare illuminated the courtyard. Beyond, the guard to the palace had been momentarily overpowered, and men were everywhere climbing over the high palings. Many were already in the open space, running toward the palace front and shouting to their comrades to come on. In the fitful red light their faces seemed like the faces of demons.

John Peters came to a standstill in front of the breach. He let go Grace's wrist, and his sword flashed from its scabbard. "Women to the north rooms of the palace," he shouted. "Brother officers and men to me."

He pushed Grace away from him and sprang toward the breach, followed by a dozen or more of others. The

foremost of the rioters were already in the corridors when John Peters and his little band swept down upon them.

"Outside, you dogs!" he cried fiercely. "A moment's grace only. Out you go!"

The drawn sword and the face of John Peters, black with rage, were terrifying enough. The rioters hesitated. Only their leader sprang forward, and without a moment's hesitation John Peters ran him through the body. The man threw up his arms and fell with a shriek, and John Peters, his sword red with blood, stepped out through the opening in the wall — out into the gravelled space before the palace.

"To your homes, you dogs!" he cried, "you cowards, who make war upon women and old men! To your homes, or by heaven you will never reach them alive!"

For a moment the mob seemed cowed. Then mutterings began, and finally a hoarse roar of voices. Those who had retreated began to reclimb the palings. John Peters stepped even further forward, so that all could see him.

"I speak to save the life of any honest fool who may be among you," he cried. "One step farther and you come to your death. Look yonder."

They turned their heads and saw the soldiers, some half dressed, hastening from the side door of the palace to the row of Maxims hastily being wheeled into position. Some one from the crowd raised a rifle and fired; the bullet

whistled past the ear of the man who stood there so conspicuous an object, and flattened itself harmlessly against the wall of the palace. As if in answer the Maxims spoke. In an instant the air was hideous with shrieks. A long line of the rioters threw up their arms, staggered away, and collapsed. Scarcely one was left unhurt within the enclosure, and from somewhere beyond the square came the roll of drums. It was enough. The rioters broke and fled.

John Peters walked about for a few minutes giving orders. A regiment of soldiers marched into the enclosure, guns were hastily mounted, and the gates secured. But the rioters seemed to have melted away. In a few moments the square was deserted.

The man who had stayed the panic turned and walked slowly back into the palace. There was still the ugly breach in the wall, where two of the great windows had been blown away, but the fire was already extinct. He stepped across the corridor and into the great ballroom, thronged with terrified women, screaming, asking wild questions, hysterical. The blood from the sword which he still carried was dripping slowly upon the polished floor.

"Ladies," he said, raising his voice so that every one in the hall might hear, "let me assure you that there is no danger of any sort. A bomb has been thrown through one of the windows of the palace, and a certain amount of

damage done. The fire, however, is extinct, and the rioters have been dispersed. The front of the palace is held by the soldiers, who have been quartered in the building for the last week or so, and there is not the slightest sign of any further attack."

There were cries and murmurs of relief from all sides. Then some one called his attention to the sword which he still carried, and he thrust it hastily into the scabbard.

"There may be a little delay, ladies, before you can leave," he continued, "as all carriages have been ordered to the park entrance. The dancing will recommence, the supper-room is at your command. Pray continue to amuse yourselves."

A few women began to sob hysterically. The rest sat with white faces. John Peters strolled to the bandmaster and whispered in his ear. Then he looked round for a moment and walked toward a distant couch, where a child sat with her face buried in her hands, and a woman sobbed hysterically.

"Little girl," he said, bending over her, "will you prove that you are going to grow up to be a true daughter of Bergeland? Will you dance with me?"

Though white as a sheet, she nevertheless rose at once to her feet. The music struck up, and they glided away. She bit her lips till the blood came, but she laughed softly in his face.

"Your Highness dances better than any one else in the world," she said, "but — you must take off your sword — or I shall faint."

He looked downward and saw that they were leaving a faint trail of blood. He stopped for a moment, and, unfastening the belt, handed it to a servant. She half closed her eyes, and he felt her weight against his arm, but her feet moved to the music.

"Go on!" she begged. "Don't stop, please!"

Others had followed their lead. Soon the floor became crowded. At the sound of the music and the sight of the dancers even the most terrified began to feel reassured. The moments of that dumb horror were past.

John Peters came to a standstill, and, feeling his partner clutch at his arm, led her toward the supper-room. "You are a dear, brave child," he said softly, "and I am going to make you drink a glass of wine before I take you back to your mother."

They passed into the tiny annex to the supper-room, curtained off for royalty and the man in waiting rushed off for the wine which John Peters ordered. Suddenly she leaned across and looked up at him. Her eyes were like stars.

"I saw you outside," she said, "I saw you save us all. Never in all my days shall I believe those terrible things which people say of you."

He took her little face in his great hands, and kissed her upon the forehead, very lightly, almost reverently. "Little lady," he said, "it was nothing that I did. We were quite safe, really. Still, I shall always like to think that one person believes me not quite so bad as the world would make me out."

He made her drink wine, and the colour slowly came back to her cheeks. Then he slipped a ring from his finger on to hers.

"You must wear this," he said, "in memory of this evening, until you are married. Then you may give it to your husband."

As they rose, she kissed his hand with a sudden impulsive movement. She did not say a word, even when he left her with her mother.

"Madame," he said, bowing low, "you should be very proud of your daughter. We all owe her a debt of gratitude. Bergeland will always prosper so long as her sons have the courage of her daughters."

There was a little murmur and a rustling of dresses as the women rose. The king came down the room. He was ghastly pale, and he leaned heavily upon his stick, but his eyes were almost unnaturally bright. He let his hand fall upon his nephew's shoulder heavily.

"Now what about the army, eh, John?" he demanded. "Who said they would not fire upon rioters,

eh? Grobener told me the truth. I am almost glad this has happened. We know where we are now!"

John Peters drew him a little to one side. "My dear uncle," he said, "the whole thing was rather a bluff. We had a hundred picked men, with Maxims, quartered in the palace, in case anything of this sort should happen. We can rely upon them, it is true. What an entire regiment would have done we cannot say."

"But the whole square is full of troops," the king said.

"Exactly, but they arrived after the affair was over," John Peters said dryly. "Ah! there is a young lady with whom I must speak. Excuse me, sir."

Grace was standing alone by a pillar — her eyes had called him. She was pale, and her manner was almost nervous. He stood by her side in silence. She felt the question that his lips refused to utter.

"I could not go without seeing you," she said. "Please take me for one moment where we can be alone. I am not often so foolish, but I have had rather a shock to-night."

He took her into the little annex to the supper-room. "Well?" he asked, and his voice seemed to have gathered a new note of sternness.

"You can't believe that I had anything to do with it?" she exclaimed. "Oh, you can't!"

"I am glad," he answered. "I must confess that I was anxious to be assured."

"I came with a message for the leader of the Republican party here," she said, "but he never came to see me. My friends — no, those whom I used to call my friends — would have helped in any rising here by money or even worse means, but they are not anarchists. They would have had nothing to do with bombs."

"I am glad, dear," he said. "For a moment I was afraid. We have had no bomb-throwing in Varia up to now."

"You believe me?"

"Absolutely," he answered, "but I would like to see you free from this sort of thing. Why did you ever lend yourself to it?"

"Will you come and see me to-morrow?" she asked. "I should like to tell you."

"At the Hotel Bergman?" he asked.

"No, at Madame de Sayers'," she answered. "I went to the Bergman only to meet some one who did not come."

He took her back to her aunt. The guests were all departing now. Screens had been raised, and except for the hammering of workmen, no sign of any untoward event remained. Yet there were very few among those who made their final bow to royalty who did not wonder whether ever again the palace of the king would be open to receive his guests.

CHAPTER XXI

HIS Majesty the King of Bergeland on the following morning was in an excellent humour. He threw a little bundle of newspapers upon the table at which three men were standing — John Peters, General Grobener, and Baron Bernhardt.

"There!" he said, "I have read them all. You, too, perhaps. The *Star*, even, the most disloyal paper published, denounces last night's outrage as atrocious. They are all in the same strain. I shall believe no more in the disloyalty of my people, any more than I shall believe in the disaffection of my army."

John Peters, who, with the others, had risen respectfully at the king's entrance, shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Sir," he said, "the papers of the country could do no more nor any less than they have done. I believe that last night's affair was an altogether unauthorized plot on the part of the extreme section. Thanks to favouring circumstances, it failed. But ——"

"The favouring circumstances being your Highness's own courage and presence of mind," Bernhardt said, with a rare note of enthusiasm in his tone. "We others were

impotent. It was you who saved the palace, who saved the city, perhaps, from the most disgraceful scene in modern history."

John Peters looked a little annoyed. "Let that go," he answered impatiently. "What I was going to say was, that if by chance that attack had succeeded, it might very soon have been changed from an unauthorized into an authorized one. We know, Bernhardt and I know, that behind this rabble stands a great united party, whose firm resolve is to pull down the throne of Bergeland."

"And how the devil do you pretend to know anything about it, sir," the king asked, turning upon him passionately, "you, whose dissipations and excesses and evil character have done more than anything else in the world to set the people against my house? How the devil can you pretend to be a judge of the political sentiment of the country?"

"I may be all that you say," John Peters answered calmly, "but I am not a fool, and I don't bury my head in the sand when there is trouble about. I know that when Parliament meets in a fortnight's time, with a huge Republican majority, they 're not going to vote us money to support a monarchy. We shall be lucky if we get our railway tickets to the frontier."

"The monarchy," King Ferdinand answered, "is

established by constitutional law, and nothing short of a revolution can upset that."

"A revolution is exactly what we have to fear," Bernhardt declared. "I am bound to tell your Majesty that we have some very serious information."

"Well, what is it?" the king asked sharply.

"There is in existence," Bernhardt continued, "the complete draft for a constitutional republic, with every office filled, and every arrangement made. It will be placed upon the table, and carried into effect, within five minutes of the meeting of the new Parliament, and whether it be according to law or not, your Majesty's reign will have ceased in the eyes of the people."

"Whose work is this?" the king demanded, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"It is the work of one man, your Majesty, working through the sub-committee of the Republican party. It is the man whom they call the First Watcher."

The king's face was not pleasant to look upon. He was almost livid with rage. "To-day," he declared, striking the table with his clenched fist, "that man is a traitor. If he could be arrested he could be dealt with in a few hours. And he snaps his fingers at us! It is you, Bernhardt, who are responsible. You are head of the government police; you have unlimited powers. You come and tell me stories

of this man, and when I ask you why he is not arrested, you shrug your shoulders, you have hopes — it will come soon! And now the end is at hand, and the man is still unsuspected."

"Not unsuspected, your Majesty," Bernhardt answered gravely.

"Then for heaven's sake arrest him on suspicion," the king declared angrily. "Do something to show that you and your police are not dummies."

Bernhardt bowed submissively. "Your Majesty," he said, "I doubt whether we could hold him if we attempted an arrest, but we will risk it. One last effort shall be made before Parliament assembles. I promise that."

John Peters looked up from the table, where he had been drawing idle figures with his pencil. "After all," he said, "even if our friend Bernhardt succeeds in arresting the man it seems to me that his work is finished. We stop nothing by his arrest. In fourteen days the Republic of Bergeland is to be pronounced."

"We will see about that," the king declared. "I shall open Parliament myself, and the whole army of the country will be assembled in Parliament Square. If they can play bold strokes, so can we. We 'll march troops in, arrest every one who speaks of that charter as traitors, dissolve Parliament, and have a fresh election."

"Unfortunately," Bernhardt remarked quietly, "there

will be half a million Bergians gathered together, in and around the city, to support the new Parliament."

The king turned an angry face upon the speaker. "Well," he said, "what is it that you others propose, then? You find fault enough with my suggestions. Let us hear yours!"

Grobener raised his hand. "I am with his Majesty," he declared. "I say that all this talk of a republic is rank treason, and the army stands pledged to support the throne."

"You hear, gentlemen?" the king declared.

Bernhardt looked across at the general. "General," he said, "at the first sound of disturbance last night I myself telephoned to the barracks for two regiments of soldiers."

"They were on their way in less than a quarter of an hour," the general answered.

"Two regiments should mean a thousand men," Bernhardt remarked. "How many left barracks?"

"I have no idea," the general answered hotly; "nor is it your business. The roll was called hastily. Some were out on leave."

"Not one-quarter of the two regiments, General," Bernhardt said quietly. "Two hundred and twenty men left the barracks. No more."

"I dispute your statement, sir," the general exclaimed.

"As you will, General," Bernhardt answered, "only, my facts are correct, and it seems to me that wilfully, or because you are yourself deceived, you are misleading his Majesty as to the complete loyalty of the army."

"His Majesty will accept the word of a soldier about his men before that of a policeman," the general sneered. "I repeat to his Majesty that my honour is pledged to defend his person and the country with the army I have the privilege to command."

"You hear, sir!" the king thundered.

"There were only two hundred and twenty men," Bernhardt murmured.

"Enough for the purpose, at any rate," the king answered. "The mob melted away before the very rattle of their drums."

"They melted away because they were a mob, unarmed and undisciplined," John Peters said; "besides, their leader was dead. It will be a very different crowd we shall have to deal with a little later on."

"I wait still," the king said, "for your proposals."

"I think," John Peters said, "that you know my mind. I think that the country has had enough of us, and I think that the country is right. Your Majesty permits me to speak with perfect frankness?"

"Go on, sir," the king answered.

"Your Majesty has ruled over Bergeland for twenty

years, and the country has paid pretty dearly for the luxury. You have amassed an immense fortune by private means, means which have become the scandal of all Europe, but nevertheless you have demanded your uttermost pound of flesh from the taxpayers of the country, even in times of dire distress. Your charities have been nil, your private life a scandal. You have set the country an example upon the *plage* at Misten, the cafés of Paris, and the pleasure-resorts of Vienna, which the more respectable portion of it is never likely to forget. Your name is associated with no single work undertaken for the advancement of the country. A man's private life is his own, a king's is his own only so long as he conceals, or attempts to conceal, its unsavoury parts. You have done neither. Therefore the people hate you, and my earnest advice is that, when Parliament meets and proclaims its Republic, we make the best of a bad matter and accept its decision."

The king was almost speechless, but his lips had parted a little, so that his teeth showed like a wolf's fangs. "You propose, then," he whispered hoarsely across the table, "that we abdicate without a single blow, when we have the army, and if necessary the whole of the German army, behind us?"

"I do," John Peters answered, "because the end would be the same. If we incite the people to bloodshed, we

shall pay for it with our lives. If we call in mercenaries, we shall be, beyond a shadow of doubt, assassinated. Why not make the most of our lives? You are fabulously rich; I can find enough to live on. We both have some idea, I think, how to amuse ourselves. We shall have to go some day. Let us go gracefully."

"You are a coward, nephew!" the king thundered.

"No, I think not," John Peters answered calmly. "It is n't that. I have common sense and a smattering of philosophy."

The king rose. Anger seemed to have given him strength, for he leaned no more upon his stick. He pointed a threatening finger at his nephew. "You," he cried, "have dared to sit there and reproach me with my private life — you, the most dissolute young vagabond who ever bore our name. Do you need to be reminded of the shameful things you have done? Within a stone's throw of the palace gates your photograph can be bought, sitting as host of a most disgraceful supper party — buy it and look at your picture! You, who have suffered yourself to be seen with the creatures of the Boulevards, even in your own capital, at public supping places, a haunter of low cafés, a devotee of all the vices which ever came from hell! Damn you, sir, it is you and nobody else who has brought this trouble upon us."

There was a silence. The king resumed his chair,

breathing heavily. John Peters made no sign, but after several moments he raised his head.

"To revert to the subject of our discussion, sir," he said, "must we take it for granted that you will refuse in any case to abdicate?"

"Absolutely, finally," the king declared. "The mob can do its worst. I am here, and I stay."

"Is that the way," she asked, with a shy little laugh, "that engaged people kiss in Varia?" [*Page* 187

CHAPTER XXII

GRACE was alone when John Peters was shown into the room. He bent over her hands and kissed them.

"Is that the way," she asked, with a shy little laugh, "that engaged people kiss in Varia?"

He laughed and took her in his arms. Presently they sat down upon a sofa.

"Let me tell you," she begged, "how I came to be mixed up with those silly people."

"Be quick about it," he said. "I've more interesting things to talk about."

"What are they?" she asked.

"Ourselves. Your turn first. Go on."

"After all, there is n't much to tell," she said. "You know I was a Wellesley girl, and I took honours in social science. I had what they called advanced ideas. I belonged to the school whose central belief is that every nation, and every unit of a nation, has a complete and incontrovertible right to preserve intact and develop its own individuality. I remember that I once went to a course of lectures of which the ill-government of your nation formed the text."

"My uncle has had a pretty good innings," he admitted "Go on."

"Well, I came to Europe, and I had cards to a good many people in England. I can't mention names — you won't expect that, but one day I was asked whether I was not willing to give some practical effect to my beliefs. I replied that there was nothing I should like better. Then I was told that in every capital of Europe there were branches of a society, harmless in itself, but always seeking for opportunities to remove from positions of authority people who impeded the cause of the people. The very name of the head of the English branch gave me the requisite amount of confidence. He was a great millionaire and shopkeeper, a radical, and a man of advanced views, but also a man of unblemished character. I said I would do what I could, and I heard no more about it for some time. Then you came, and I learned who you were. That old man came to me and suggested — don't laugh, he was perfectly serious — that I should play the deliverer. I pointed out that my hatred of tyranny was also coupled with certain distinct convictions as to the sanctity of human life. He seemed disappointed, but he took my secrecy as a matter of course. Then he came to me again. He asked me whether you were going to see me on the following night. I hesitated, and of course he knew. Then he said that he asked me no more than this — that I keep you with me and

allow you to depart at a certain time. The rest I was to know nothing about. As a matter of fact you were coming, and I told him so. I sent you away at half-past one, exactly at the time he told me, but it was because my clock had stopped."

"As a matter of curiosity," John Peters asked, "supposing you had known of that little arrangement outside, would you have warned me?"

"Don't ask me," she begged. "Remember that I knew so little about you. You represented to me and to all my friends the one human type whose presence upon the face of the earth is a real and effective bar to progress. You were the enemy of the people. That was what I had to think of. If it had been a question of imprisonment, of keeping you away from the position you had no right to occupy, well, then, I do believe that I should have given you up. But a blow in the dark, like that — I don't think I could have done it, dear, even if I had believed it justified."

"And your presence here now, Grace? What of that?"

"Well, it was certain that things were going to happen here, and I can speak the language. I am really here as a sort of correspondent. I was to have seen your mysterious enemy and offered him help if it was necessary. Curiously enough, he has never even approached me."

"Yours seems a very slack sort of society," he remarked.

"Why, I could have gone to Scotland Yard and sworn information against the four of you."

She shook her head. "They are not so foolish as they seem," she declared. "It is part of their policy to seem to dispense with secrecy altogether, but if anything serious is really attempted they have most elaborate safeguards. Those men would all have been able to prove most convincingly that they were somewhere else if you had made any attempt to turn the tables on them."

He leaned over and took her hand. "Little woman," he said, "let this end your career as a conspirator. You 'll only get into trouble, and I 've enough to think about just now without worrying about you. Promise!"

She assented laughingly. "I don't think I should ever do anything brilliant," she declared. "Tell me, is the city quiet this morning?"

"Quiet enough," he answered, "for a few days. After Parliament opens the end is certain. I am afraid after all, though, that it will not be quite so simple a matter as I had hoped."

"In what way?" she asked quickly.

"None of us," he answered, "can make my uncle see reason. He declares that he will stay and fight; he places altogether too much confidence in the army. Worse than that, if things go wrong he is scheming for German aid."

"You have talked to him?"

"Till I am weary. So have we all. The only chance is that he will get such a scare when the time comes that he 'll change his mind. At present he refuses to abdicate."

"If you call Germany in," she said, "Bergeland will never be a free country all her days."

"If Germany moves," he answered, "the republic will appeal at once to France and England."

She smiled, as though amused at her thoughts. "One would think," she remarked, "that you were one of the Republicans yourself."

"Perhaps," he said, smiling, "I shall not be sorry to bid good-bye to royalty. You are a brave woman, Grace, to take me so much on trust. I 've the most horrible reputation in Europe."

She half closed her eyes with a little shiver. "John, dear," she said, "when I feel unhappy about that I shall always think of last night. I do not believe that brave men can ever be really vicious. But remember, you 've promised to improve."

"I 'll try," he declared. "Good-bye, dear! May I come to-morrow?"

She walked with him to the door, and watched him leave the house and turn into the park. He walked slowly, with his hands behind him and his eyes upon the ground. There were few people about, and the broad walks were almost deserted. Perhaps for that reason John Peters

noticed the swift, stealthy footsteps behind him, and turned round — just in time. The man who had been following him was holding out a revolver at arm's length, and seemed to be in the very act of pulling the trigger.

John Peters sprang a little to one side, but the man, although he kept him covered, did not attempt to fire. He seemed to be a workman of somewhat superior class, but his clothes were torn, and he had several wounds upon his face, as though he had been recently engaged in some struggle. John Peters put out his hand in a gesture of command.

"Put that thing away," he ordered. "What do you want with me?"

Not a muscle of the man's face moved. He lowered the revolver slightly, but he still held it in his locked fingers. "What I want from you," he said, "is payment of a just debt. I want what I came last night to the palace to claim, but those who were with me were cowards, and they ran. I have waited long enough, so I have come alone. It is your life I am going to take."

John Peters looked rapidly round. Brave man though he was, he had not the least intention of losing his life at the hands of a lunatic in so purposeless a manner as this. There was not a soul in sight, however, nor could he at once think of any ready means of escape. He turned back to the man.

"Well," he said, "if I have to die I can, but I should like to know what I have done to you to deserve it."

The man, whose continued calmness was almost unnatural, moistened his lips with the end of his tongue. "I am the father," he said, "of Estelle Borgin."

"Then, Mr. Borgin," John Peters said, "I am very glad to know you, and also to know that you have a daughter, but as I have never seen either of you before in my life I am still at a loss to know why you should think of murdering me."

"You are a liar!" the man said. "Me you may not have seen or remembered, but Estelle — you took her away, and now her mother is gone. There is nothing left for me but vengeance, and that I mean to have."

John Peters faced the man squarely. "Look at me," he said. "Do you believe that I am the person who took your daughter away?"

The man moved his feet uneasily. "You are the Crown Prince of Bergeland," he said. "There are many others in Varia besides my daughter who have reasons to hate that name."

"Look at me again," John Peters said. "Do you believe that it was I who took away your daughter?"

The man raised his revolver. "I do," he answered, "and you are going to die for it."

Then John Peters realized that there was nothing to be

gained by further temporizing. He was holding in his hand a silver-headed cane, and, leaping suddenly to one side, he struck at the revolver. The first bullet just touched his ear. The second went into the air as the revolver flew out of the man's hand, and the man himself was lifted off his feet in an iron grasp.

"You infernal assassin!" John Peters said to him angrily. "I 've a good mind to shake the life out of you."

He stooped down, and with his left hand picked up the revolver and threw it into a distant pond.

"Now listen to me, Borgin, or whatever your name is," he said. "To the best of my knowledge I never saw your daughter in my life. You have been deceived. Can you understand that?"

"Yes," the man answered sullenly, "I can understand what you say."

"Do you believe it?" John Peters asked.

"No!" the man answered. "They all told me that it was the crown prince, even she herself. My wife saw her driving with you. One does n't make such mistakes."

John Peters shook him again gently. "I wish," he said, "that I could shake some sense into your head. Now, on my honour, I tell you that I never saw your daughter in my life. Are you satisfied?"

"I do not know," the man answered, bewildered.

Two figures came in sight round a bend of the walk. John Peters, looking up, saw them; so did his captive.

"Here come the park-keepers at last," John Peters said. "Now look here, my man, will you believe me or won't you?"

"I will try," the man said in a low tone, "but they all told me that it was the crown prince."

John Peters let him go. "Get that idea out of your head, my friend," he said. "Go back to your work, and you may find that there are better times coming for you all in Varia; but if I catch you dogging my footsteps again it will not go quite so easily with you."

The man stood where John Peters left him, looking after the tall, powerful figure, and muttering softly to himself. As the park-keepers came nearer, he turned into a byway and disappeared. John Peters, taking a short cut, entered the palace grounds by a private gate.

"I suppose," he said to himself grimly, "that this is one of the penalties of the game, but I am inclined to agree with Bernhardt after all. I don't think they 'll ever let me out of this city alive."

CHAPTER XXIII

AT NINE o'clock that same evening three men, the professor, Levitt, and Grammont, were sitting at the end of a long table in the dimly lighted room of a well-known restaurant. They were talking together in whispers and evidently waiting for some one else.

"We know who 's responsible, of course," Levitt was saying, his dark eyes flashing, and his white hands drumming upon the table. "It was Hergmann's work without a doubt. He 's always been mad that we have had nothing to do with him and his butchering methods. And after all, if he 'd succeeded, well, it might have hurried things on."

"I," the professor said, "am now wholly with our chief. I believe in pacific methods. I believe that our present scheme is unassailable."

"And I," Levitt said, leaning forward so that the light fell upon his dark, strongly marked face, "I tell you once and for all that I have no faith in bloodless revolutions. If the king is coward enough to fly, let him go, but the crown prince has deserved death fifty times over, and I think that he will find it when the time comes."

"We must talk a little about that, gentlemen," a voice said from the shadows.

They all rose to their feet. Their unknown chief had entered silently from the other end of the room. He seated himself a few feet away from them at the head of the table, where the shadows were deepest. Again he wore the black silk mask which completely concealed his face. Again they all looked at him with that curiosity against which they were always struggling as disloyal, but which during the last few weeks had become almost a passion.

"I was in time, gentlemen," he said, "to hear your last remarks. I also gathered, I think from Mr. Levitt, that he has no faith in bloodless revolutions. This one, I want to impress upon you, is going to be a bloodless revolution."

"We hope so," the professor said, "but after all it will be as the people shall decide, for it will be their day."

"I have summoned you here," the man at the head of the table said, "because of the events of last night. I want to know whether you, or any one of you, or any one of our sub-committee, or any one known to you, was responsible for throwing that bomb into the palace."

"The answer to all those questions," Grammont answered, "is no. At the same time it is idle to deceive ourselves. There are a great many among us who are calling for vigorous measures, who do not believe that the

country can be set free without the striking of one great blow. It was some of these, no doubt, who were concerned in the attempt last night, which ended so disastrously."

The man at the head of the table leaned a little toward them. He spoke slowly and very impressively. Every word seemed suggestive of power. Once more they felt themselves in the presence of a man who dominated them with ease whenever he chose.

"Listen," he said, "you, Grammont, and you, Professor, and you, Levitt. Twelve months ago I was unknown to you or any of your party. Then I began to write you letters, to which you were pleased to attach some importance. I began to draw up and send for your consideration schemes which you found good. I told you things in international history which were coming to pass, and I showed you how to strengthen the ranks of your party, and to gain power and standing. You have progressed enormously, and many of you were pleased to consider that it was due to my advice and to my leadership, if you choose to call it so. Then came the suggestion from you that we should meet. I told you then that it did not suit my purpose to be known in Varia as a Republican. I would meet you, I said, on my own terms, and they were these." He touched his mask and waved his hand around the room. "We meet in secret, and so far as I know you are in

ignorance as to whom I may be. Now I ask you this question as men of honour, and I beg that you will each answer me separately. Grammont, Professor, Levitt, you have spent many hours with me, do you know who I am? Are you conscious of ever having seen or spoken with me anywhere save at our meeting places?"

Their noes were unanimous. The man at the head of the table inclined his head gravely.

"Very well, then," he said, "I will tell you what it is that I propose. You hold the first of your four great meetings to-morrow night. You already have my plan of the proceedings, and I have shown you how to prevent any interference from the police. I wish to come to that meeting."

Levitt sprang up with a little cry of excitement. "At last, then," he exclaimed, "you are going to declare yourself!"

"I do not intend to do so," was the quiet answer. "I am going to take a somewhat extraordinary course, but I believe that it can be done, and I am willing to take the risks. I wish to speak to the whole committee of your party together, but I still wish to remain, as now, unknown. The meeting is in the museum lecture-hall, at the corner of the Boulevard du Pont. I have been over the room carefully, and I have convinced myself that what I suggest is possible. It has already been arranged that when every one is present

the door shall be locked. At twenty minutes to ten the electric lights are to be turned off, and I shall enter by the small door at the back of the building, for which you will bring me a key. It leads almost on to the platform, and I shall look to you to see that no one is allowed in that passage. At a quarter to ten I shall speak to the committee.

The three men looked at him in dumb wonder. The professor was the first to break the silence.

"There will be some risks," he said. "A match may be struck, for instance, or some one may blunder against you in the dark."

"There will be some risks, of course," the man answered, "and I am prepared to take them. All I ask from you is that you do your part in seeing that, so far as possible, no attempt is made to force me to disclose myself. Believe me, it would not be for the good of our cause. I have some papers here with reference to the proceedings between now and next Tuesday. You had better take them back to your sub-committee, and if you have any suggestions to make, I will consider them. But remember above all things what my aim has been and is, with reference to the things that are about to happen. This is to be a bloodless revolution."

He rose, and the other three followed his example.

"There is one man, sir," Levitt said, "whom I do not think, however anxious we may be to avoid bloodshed,

will ever be allowed to leave this country alive, if once the city is in the hands of the people."

The man at the head of the table, who was preparing to depart by the way he had come, looked around. "Whom do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean the crown prince," Levitt answered.

The man smiled beneath his mask, a smile of which all save himself were unconscious. "So long as the king is allowed to depart unharmed," he said, "the rest is not so great a matter. The crown prince is a young man. He can fight his own battles."

CHAPTER XXIV

"MADEMOISELLE is perhaps tired," Bernhardt remarked, as he handed Grace to her chair. "Last night's events at the palace were somewhat fatiguing."

Grace shook her head as she settled herself in her seat, and glanced up and down the long, brilliantly lighted table. "No," she said, "it is not that. I think that I rather like excitement. To tell you the truth, I am a little overpowered. You must remember that I lived very quietly in England, and I am not used to all this splendour."

Bernhardt, who was rapidly discovering that his dinner companion was the handsomest woman in the room, laughed as he leaned toward her confidentially. "The Germans have always entertained splendidly at the embassy here," he remarked, "and this man, the Prince de Suess, is an excellent host. But wait until you have seen a dinner-party at the palace. The gold plate there is really marvellous."

Grace looked at him and looked away again. She helped herself leisurely from the dish which the footman

was handing her. "One hears such strange things in Varia just now," she said. "I understood that very soon there would be no more dinner-parties at the palace."

Bernhardt shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he said, "one cannot tell. You must not believe all you hear, especially just now, when there is so much unsettlement in the country, but I am bound to say that things do look rather serious for the loyalists."

"I should like so much," she said, "to understand your politics."

"Nothing," he assured her, "is simpler. We are what is called a limited monarchy. We have one house of assembly, which, twenty years ago, did exactly what the king told it to do, and voted exactly the measures which he demanded. You know very well what has happened in the last twenty years. In every country it has been the same story. The people have insisted upon having a voice in their own government. In Russia they call themselves nihilists. They are simply the people speaking for the people. In Bergeland they have come on by leaps and bounds. Our elections were a month ago, and out of two hundred members, one hundred and fifty Republicans were returned. Parliament reassembles in a fortnight's time. What will happen then is just what is puzzling Europe."

"What do you think will happen?" Grace asked.

"My dear young lady," Bernhardt answered, "I do not know, and, to be very frank with you, if I did I should not dare to say. If the country is left altogether to itself, one might easily guess, but I fancy that our host there is anxious to have something to say."

"I read the papers a little," Grace said, "and they all seem agreed upon one thing, that it is the degeneration of the present royal house here which has helped the Republican cause so much."

Bernhardt looked around a little cautiously. "Do not forget, my dear young lady," he said, "that the crown prince is on the other side of the table. Still, one must admit that you are right. All the world knows of the old king's doings, and Prince John has certainly managed at times to cap even his uncle's exploits."

She looked thoughtfully across at the man who sat at the right hand of their hostess. His head was at that moment bent courteously toward her, but the smile upon his lips was of the faintest, and his eyes seemed far away. She touched Bernhardt on the arm.

"Look at him now," she whispered. "Is that the man whose photographs they sell in the kiosks, drinking wine out of the slipper of a dancing girl, the man whose extravagances were the talk of Paris for weeks? Look at him. Did you ever see a man whose face so belied his history!"

Bernhardt nodded sympathetically. The subject was one which for him, too, had an absorbing interest.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "it is amazing. I have known the prince for many years, and I can come to no other conclusion than that he has this strange thing which psychologists call a dual personality. I have seen him myself in the lowest resorts of this city, shameless, drunken, steeped in a debauch. I have seen him like this not once nor twice, but often. He has companions here, known companions, whom I cannot name to you. Then we saw him last night, you and I, alert, fearless, a hero of muscle and brain, the strong man guarding his own. If you can read me the riddle of the crown prince, you will stop the speculation of years."

She was watching him all the time he spoke. "You have some idea in your mind, have you not?" she asked softly, "some possible explanation?"

"You are observant," he said. "What can one say? One knows these things of him. They may be strange, but they are true."

Some one across the table spoke to Bernhardt, and Grace had leisure for a moment or two to look about her. Forty or fifty guests were seated around the long table, ablaze with flowers and wonderfully arranged electric lights. It was a dinner-party which the king himself was to have attended, but the events of last night had shaken

him so he was unable to leave his room. The crown prince, however, was in his place, and although they had not met in the reception-room, his eyes had met Grace's more than once across the table. Her host leaned forward to speak to her.

"Do you make a long stay in Varia, mademoiselle?" he asked.

"That depends very much upon my aunt, Prince," she answered. "Madame de Sayers usually goes south about this time of the year."

"Is it your first visit?" he asked.

"Indeed, no!" she answered. "I am half a Bergian. Madame de Sayers and my mother were sisters."

"You should spend more time here then," he said courteously, and turned toward one of his other guests.

Grace leaned back in her chair, anxious for Bernhardt to finish his conversation. Somehow she had an idea that if he would he could tell her more of her lover than he had done. He spoke to her again in a few minutes.

"You are going on to the dance at the Russian Embassy?" he asked.

She nodded. "I suppose we all are," she answered.

"Then may I hope for the pleasure," he asked, "of at least one waltz; that is to say, if you do not object to dancing with any one so ancient?"

"You may take your choice," she answered, smiling,

"for you must remember that I am almost a stranger here. They tell me that the crown prince and you have been great friends during the last few years."

"We have seen a great deal of each other," he admitted.

"I have heard it said," she continued, in a lower tone, "that you know more about him than any other man in Bergeland."

He turned and looked her steadily in the face, and she realized at once that whatever he might know or suspect he was not likely to tell her. "That may be true," he said. "The prince has few intimates, even in those moments of his which I suppose we should call his moments of pleasure."

Their conversation drifted to other subjects, and very soon the dinner came to a close. The whole party passed out into the reception-rooms together, some smoking, some making their way into the farther salon, where a small orchestra was playing. Grace sat down in a corner with her aunt, and watched the people.

"We must stay for only a few minutes," Madame de Sayers said. "It is not expected of us, as every one is going on to the ball, even our host and hostess."

"Five minutes longer," Grace begged. "I like to watch the people." And in less than five minutes John Peters came by, having made his adieu to his hostess. He stopped and bowed low before Madame de Sayers.

"Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you and your niece later on?" he asked. "I hope so."

Madame de Sayers raised her eyebrows. "As for me," she said, "I am old, and you frightened me so last night I would rather go home to bed. But what can one do with a frivolous niece, who comes to see one so seldom?"

He looked at Grace and smiled. "Mademoiselle will, I hope, keep for me two dances?" he said precisely.

She looked down. "Mademoiselle will be very pleased," she murmured.

Then he bowed once more and walked out, bidding good nights right and left, and showing no signs of hurry, yet in his heart he felt that he was committed that night to perhaps the most hazardous enterprise of his life.

CHAPTER XXV

NO MORE curious scene, perhaps, could possibly have been imagined. A great room was in darkness. From end to end the place pulsated with excitement, audible in low, hoarse whisperings, even in the quickly drawn breaths of the row upon row of waiting men. The more highly strung and nervous were even conscious of a tendency toward hysteria.

Then a door slammed somewhere in the rear, footsteps were heard, and a low murmur of expectancy went throbbing through the crowd. There was some one upon the platform. They could see nothing, but they were sure of it. Many half rose in their places. Some one tried a little feeble applause, but it died away at once. And then a voice came from where the darkness was deepest, on the left hand side of the platform.

"My fellow countrymen," it said, "I have come at last to talk to you myself. Forgive me if I have chosen a strange way of doing so. Believe me when I assure you honestly that it is best for all of us that you should know me at present only by a name."

They held their breaths. Applause? They never

thought of it. Welcome? They were very sure that he did not require it. They listened. That was all that they felt he desired.

"I have come to you myself," the voice continued, "because we of Bergeland are fast approaching the greatest crisis which this country has ever known. I have given many of the best hours of my life to the framing of a constitution which should contain all that was possible of the best, as little as might be of the purposeless and inutile. That constitution your committee has accepted in its entirety. By organized and carefully arranged classes, by lectures, and by strict selection of teachers in all the schools, we have taught the people of this country the beauty of self-development, their higher duties toward the state, the magnificent and all-conquering creed of a militant and practical republicanism. You sowed the seed, and now, in the result of the elections, you have reaped the harvest. In fourteen days' time you can give to this country legally, and in proper form, what I believe to be the most perfect and truly republican government possessed by any state in the world."

The voice ceased for a moment. Something moved across the stage. They thought he had changed his position, but when he spoke again the voice came from the same place.

"Now I come," the voice said, "to the reason why I

felt it imperative that I should speak to you to-night. We are on the eve of the greatest change through which a nation can pass, and we have an opportunity of making our country famous to-day, and famous throughout the world's history. There is no need for our streets to run red with blood, there is no need for our prisons to be full and our scaffold a shambles. We can follow out our destiny, and we can obey at the same time the greatest of all human laws. I know very well that such mad scenes as those of last night, when some maniac strove to wreck the palace, are not to your liking, are not in your programme. Say to yourselves that they shall not be. If one among you talks of assassination and all the time-worn impedimenta of anarchy, convert him, or let him go. For yourselves, remember that a greater power than brute force is yours. Make your splendid revolution the envy of the world — make it as bloodless as it will be historic. I have come to tell you this, that if my advice, my leadership, the years I have given to your cause, have merited any consideration whatever at your hands, let it come to me in this way, that my request to you to-night is granted; that, one and all, you discourage force, avoid bloodshed, forgive where it is necessary, and forget where you can. So shall you build up the great new republic of our dear country upon the finest foundation ever conceived in the hearts of men."

The voice ceased, and some of them fancied that he was gone. A man, however, rose from the body of the building and turned his face toward the platform.

"Sir," he said, "peace is a good thing toward those who come with peace in their hands. But I would ask you, what about the king?"

All bent forward in their places. Was he gone or not? The voice answered them.

"The king is an old man, and the measure of his days is almost full. When he realizes this thing he will go."

"The crown prince, then? He is young and headstrong. Will he so easily give up a throne?"

"He must accept his banishment, or take the consequences," the voice answered. "I think that he, too, will be open to persuasion. For him, though, I hold no brief. But I tell you that to the king's gray hairs no harm must come."

Then there was a moment's silence, broken in a most tempestuous manner. From outside came the sound of fierce voices, followed by a revolver shot, then a beating upon the door, such a beating that the panels creaked and groaned.

"In the name of the commissioner of the police, open!"

Again came the voice from the platform, perfectly cool, not even hurried. "Sit still, my friends. You break no

law here. It is I whom they are after, and my escape is provided for."

Then silence again, broken by shouting from the back of the platform and the crashing of the door as it fell, torn from its hinges. A stream of men entered from both ends, carrying torches in their hands. The people sat and blinked at them, a perfectly well-ordered, well-conducted crowd. But on the platform was no one — nor in the waiting-room behind! Bernhardt stood upon the platform and shouted:

"Guard the doors, there! Every man who leaves this room must be identified."

A rush of cold air, and he turned sharply round. One of the high windows on his left was open. He strode toward it and looked out.

"To me!" he cried, leaping out. "This way!"

John Peters withdrew his arm from Marie's waist, and set down his glass. In doing so he spilled a little; it seemed that his hand was not altogether steady. His face was turned toward the suddenly opened door.

"Who the devil let you in here?" he asked fiercely.

Bernhardt, who was out of breath, and pale with anger, made no answer. He was busy looking round the room. He could see no signs of any hurried entrance. Both Marie and her companion were eating the same course,

their bottle of wine was almost empty. There was not a single suspicious circumstance to be noted. He could have sworn at himself, but he did his best to conceal his anger.

"No one," Bernhardt answered. "As chief commissioner of the police, I have the right to enter any room in any restaurant at any time. I exercised my privilege here."

"This is the second time you have played the spy upon me lately," John Peters said coldly. "What is the matter with you, Bernhardt? What do you want? Own up, man!"

Bernhardt shrugged his shoulders. "I am a beaten man," he said, "beaten at my own game. There is no reason why I should not tell you the truth. I came here in search of the one person whom I would sooner lay my hands on than any man on earth."

"And he ——" John Peters began. "Ah! I know. The Watcher, the First Watcher!"

Bernhardt assented silently, and John Peters, leaning back in his chair, laughed till the tears came into his eyes.

"My friend," he declared, "I am not angry with you any longer. Take a glass of wine with us. You must need it after your disappointment."

Bernhardt bowed and came to the table. He raised the glass to his lips, and looked steadily at John Peters.

"Here 's luck to the winner of to-day," he said, "and the loser of to-morrow," he added abruptly, after a moment's pause. He drained his glass and set it down empty.

"Shall I see you later?" he asked.

"No, you will not!" Marie answered for him. "To-night he belongs to me." She passed her arm through her companion's.

Bernhardt moved toward the door. "My apologies," he said, "tardy but sincere, and good night."

He disappeared. Marie slowly withdrew her arm. John Peters poured himself another glass of wine.

"That was a close shave," he remarked. "You managed everything splendidly, Marie."

She was looking at him fixedly. "Why is that man always following you about?" she asked. "What does it mean, this continual hide-and-seek between you two?"

"Little Marie," he said earnestly, "that is not a question for you to ask, or a matter for you to think about. Remember our compact: no questions, only obedience."

Her head drooped a little. "It is easy for you," she murmured.

"For you also," he answered, "if only you will make up your mind. You are such a splendid little ally! Don't spoil it!" He rose to his feet and strolled toward an inner door.

"I am going to change my clothes," he said. "Put your hat straight, and dry your eyes before I drive you home."

Grace received him with a doubtful little smile. "You have been a very long time indeed, sir," she declared. "We are going in half an hour, and I have only one dance left."

"Then I must take some one else's," he answered coolly. "Come and waltz."

"But you must tell me where you have been?" she insisted.

He laughed. "Making history," he answered. "Bernhardt and I have been together. Ask him. He will tell you all about it."

"But I shall not see him again," she declared. "It is his dance which you have appropriated."

"Then all I can say is that I believe at last in the justice of fate," John Peters declared, as he led her toward the ballroom.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE great car swung on through stretches of hilly country, past small towns and straggling villages. Everywhere were men and women streaming to work, tall chimneys whose smoke stained the blue sky, rivers whose banks were fringed with factories. Now and then they left it all as they passed through portions of the dense forest, only to emerge again presently to a repetition of the same thing. Industry seemed piled on industry, a country of workers rather than a country beautiful.

"You are amazing me," Grace said, "I had no idea that Bergeland was like this. Why, it should be one of the richest countries for its size in Europe."

"It is," John Peters answered, drawing out the clutch, and sending the car swinging down a long incline, "only its wealth has flowed in the wrong channels. Wait for a year or so, and you will see. The people are beginning to understand. They are beginning to want their own back again. They will get it now."

"You are speaking like one of them yourself," she laughed.

He was silent for a moment. "One has lucid moments,"

he said. "It has amused me to study the question from their point of view. The condemned man has usually a morbid interest in the weapon with which he is to be destroyed."

"Don't!" she said. "I don't like to hear you talk like that. You have told me that you are reconciled to being — Mr. John Peters."

"And I am," he answered gravely, laying one hand for a moment on hers. "I shall feel that I am being driven into paradise instead of exile, for you are going with me."

She sighed, a sigh of perfect content. "I suppose," she said, "I must give up the stage?"

"I am afraid so," he answered. "It will not break your heart?"

"Nothing nor anybody but you could do that," she answered softly.

They rushed through another village. The streets were thronged with working people on their way to the factories. They looked curiously at the great car, but it passed too quickly to be recognized.

"You are driving fast," she remarked.

He nodded. "We are in the centre of the real democratic district," he answered. "If these people knew who I am, I believe they would hold up the car and stone me."

She shuddered. "It is terrible," she declared, "to be so hated by one's own people."

"It is n't I so much," he answered, "as the things I represent. I have more enemies in the city itself. I sometimes wonder whether they will ever let me leave it."

"Do you mean that?" she asked, looking at him with fearful eyes.

He nodded. "There is an extreme section of the party," he remarked, "who do not believe in a bloodless revolution."

"But this wonderful leader of theirs does," she said. "Is it true that he spoke to the three hundred last night in a dark room without being seen?"

"I have heard so," he answered.

She looked at him furtively. "They say," she continued, "that he insisted that no harm must happen to the king, but that he left you to take care of yourself."

"I heard that," he admitted. "You see I 'm not popular in Varia."

"If people knew you better," she murmured, "it would be different."

"I am not sure of that," he answered. "It is true that we are a degenerate family. There is n't another royal house in Europe that has treated its people as badly as ours has done."

She sighed. "We will not talk of that, will we?" she begged. "It is all finished and done with. I have

always thought that life as a royal personage must be very difficult. It will be simpler as Mr. John Peters."

"It will be happier," he whispered, with a sudden light in his eyes, "infinitely happier."

They were drawing near the city again, passing along a road fringed with handsome villas.

"I don't quite understand," she remarked, "where your middle-class come in politically in Varia. I mean the shopkeepers, the manufacturers, the employers of all this labour. Surely their interests cannot be the same as the working people's! I should have thought that they would have represented a great anti-republican power."

"In fifty years' time," he answered, "there will be trouble. As a matter of fact, their position is too recently won for them to appreciate the situation. They are too near the people themselves from whom they came. The next generation will draw away, perhaps, but this one remembers its struggles and is faithful."

"I think I can understand that," she said.

"In fifty years' time," he said, "Bergeland should be a world-power. If only she is wisely led and not interfered with, if only she can steer clear of the great mistakes."

"Who would interfere with her?" Grace asked.

"Germany," John Peters answered at once. "She is scheming to do so now. She sees far into the future,

and she dreads rivals. I am very much afraid that my uncle is playing into her hands."

"You mean," she asked, "that he will accept her aid to bolster up his kingdom?"

"I believe that is his idea and De Suess's," John Peters answered gloomily. "Frankly, if they try it, I see no hope for any of us. Our bloodless revolution will become a carnage, and one of the first to suffer will be my uncle himself. Hello, what 's this?"

A troop of mounted police came galloping down the road from the city. At the sight of the car they drew up, and their leader waved his hand. John Peters brought the car to a standstill. The young lieutenant rode up with a salute.

"Baron Bernhardt sent us to meet your Royal Highness," he explained. "There is rioting in the city, and the main streets are not safe. The chief suggested that you return to the palace by the outer boulevards."

"Is the rioting serious?" John Peters asked.

"Not particularly, your Highness," the lieutenant answered. "It goes on more or less every day. There are a few windows broken and a few people injured."

"Do you arrest anybody?"

"Our instructions are to disperse the people, but to make no arrests unless it is absolutely necessary, your Highness," the lieutenant answered.

John Peters smiled as he slipped in the reverse and turned his car round. "Bernhardt is no fool," he remarked. "There really is no reason why he should not keep his post under the new régime. I hope he will.'

They sped around the city and drew up in front of Madame de Sayers's house.

"I wish," he said, as he handed Grace out, "that I could persuade you to go back to England, or at least as far as Paris, until these troubles are over. One can't tell exactly what may happen. If the under half got control for even a day, Varia would n't be a fit city for any woman."

"The fittest city in the world for any woman," Grace answered, "is the city where the man she loves is — especially if there is danger."

"It 's a delightful sentiment," he answered, clasping her hand, "but think of the added anxiety to the man."

"Selfish creature," she answered. "Think of the misery of the woman who knows that her lover is in danger while she is safe."

"One can't argue with you," he replied, as he reëntered the car. "I shall have to wait until I can quote — the marriage service to you."

"If I thought that you meant it," she laughed, "there would never be any marriage service."

John Peters was driving in at the palace gates, when he

suddenly brought the car to a standstill, and hailed a pedestrian who was passing out. "Sir Charles," he called, "can you spare me a few minutes?"

Sir Charles Romford, English ambassador to Bergeland, looked up quickly. He was walking with his hands behind him and his eyes fixed upon the ground — a tall, distinguished-looking man, with clean-shaven face and shrewd, kindly eyes. He did not appear particularly pleased when he saw who it was that had accosted him.

"Certainly, Prince," he answered, "I have just been to the palace."

"You have seen my uncle?" John Peters asked.

Sir Charles shook his head. "His Majesty was unfortunately slightly indisposed," he answered, "and was not able to grant me the audience I desired. To tell you the truth," he continued, "I am feeling a little upset about my continued failure to obtain an audience with the king. I happen to know that De Suess was closeted with him this morning."

John Peters descended from the driving-seat of the car, and motioned to the chauffeur to take his place. "If you do not mind, Sir Charles," he said, "we will drive slowly through the park and I will drop you at the embassy. I think it will be to our mutual advantage if you and I have a little talk."

Sir Charles stepped into the car, and John Peters, after giving some instructions to the chauffeur, seated himself by his side.

"Sir Charles," he said, "I want you to speak to me as though I were my uncle. I want you to tell me the exact reason of your visit to him this morning."

CHAPTER XXVII

SIR CHARLES was puzzled. He looked at his companion doubtfully, and hesitated a moment before he replied. "My call upon your uncle," he said, "had to do with state affairs, in which I have heard it said that you are not greatly interested."

John Peters smiled. He understood, of course, that his companion shared the universal opinion concerning him and his manner of life.

"Sir Charles," he said, "I should like you to put out of your mind for a few moments all that you have heard concerning me, the manner of my life, and my habits. Think of me, if you can, as one who is interested in the welfare of this country and is anxious to discuss with you several matters concerning it. You may find that I am able to give you quite as much information as his Majesty, my uncle."

Sir Charles turned in his seat and looked for a moment thoughtfully at his companion. Certainly there was nothing in the appearance of this young man to justify his evil reputation. His face was clean and strong and hard, his eyes were bright, and his manner earnest. There was very little to lose, after all, in taking him seriously.

"Your request, Prince," Sir Charles said, "is, I must confess, rather a surprise to me, but it is possible that I and a good many more people may have been mistaken. You wish me to tell you exactly what was in my mind when I went to see his Majesty this afternoon. First, then, I went to ask him if he could not give me some information as to the curious political condition of the country, and the probable course of events when the members of the House of Assembly have taken their places and a government is formed."

John Peters nodded. "That," he said, "is a very reasonable position. The state of affairs is certainly a little perplexing."

"Secondly," the ambassador continued, "I wished to ask him if he could give me any information respecting the massing of German troops on the eastern frontier of this country. It is an open secret that there are one hundred thousand men, in fact a complete army corps, with all equipments, rolling-stock and guns, within a few hours' journey of this city. My government does not understand it, and I am instructed to ask for an explanation. As a matter of fact, however, at present you seem to have no ministers from whom one could derive information of any sort. That is why I have just made my third unsuccessful effort to obtain an interview with the king," Sir Charles ended dryly.

John Peters nodded. "Sir Charles," he said, "I am glad that you have been frank with me. I can tell you more, perhaps, about these happenings than you would have believed possible."

"You interest me very much," Sir Charles remarked.

"To begin with," John Peters said, "you are probably aware that the government which is coming into power is composed almost entirely of Republicans. The moment Parliament is opened they will have their list of ministers already made out. They will proclaim a republic and appoint a president. My uncle will be asked to abdicate, and he and I, of course, will both be banished."

Sir Charles was becoming very serious. "I have heard rumours of this," he said, "but I scarcely thought it had gone quite so far. Are you quite sure of what you say, Prince?"

"I am perfectly certain," John Peters answered, "that this is the inevitable course of events. I see no help for it whatever. The republican spirit is absolutely paramount through every class of society in this country, and nothing is more certain than that Bergeland is destined to become the most modern, and I hope the most successful, republic in Europe."

Sir Charles looked again at his companion, and something of the wonder which he felt was reflected in his tone.

"You take this very philosophically, Prince," he remarked.

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. "It is the inevitable. One accepts that, of course. To pass on now to the second part of your purpose in seeking my uncle this afternoon. You wanted an explanation as to the mobilizing of those German troops on our frontier?"

"That is quite true," Sir Charles answered. "My government is most urgent in its inquiries, and insists that I demand an explanation."

"Very well," John Peters said, "here it is: My uncle is an old man, and he does not love the thought of change. In other words, having lived a king for thirty years, he prefers to die one. Therefore he is contemplating refusing to abdicate when that request is made of him."

Sir Charles inclined his head. "It is not an unreasonable position," he answered gravely.

"Our army," John Peters continued, "is of course a very small affair, and although at first my uncle professed to have great faith in it, in his heart he knows very well that against the will of the nation it is powerless. Therefore he began to look about for outside help, and turned naturally to his most powerful neighbours. You can imagine that the Prince de Suess, and behind him the Kaiser, did not hesitate to grab at such a chance. The Kaiser is only too willing to lend his aid to support my

uncle upon the throne, but you and I know very well that if once that German army corps crosses the frontier, Bergeland may call herself a republic if she will, but her existence as an independent power will be doomed forever."

"Does not his Majesty himself realize this?" Sir Charles asked.

"I have no doubt that in his heart he does," John Peters answered, "but he chooses it as the lesser of two evils."

"The lesser?" Sir Charles said softly, under his breath.

John Peters nodded. "He is, of course, mistaken," he declared. "Apart from the humiliation of the whole thing, I am perfectly certain that such a course would avail him nothing."

"You mean?" Sir Charles asked.

"I mean that he would be assassinated within a week," John Peters said. "The man who brought war into his own country, who brought mercenaries to fight his own people, would deserve death, and he would most surely be killed. However, it is the fate of the whole country of which I am thinking, and not my uncle's life or death. I want you to tell me this, Sir Charles: What position would your country take if my uncle called upon German arms to resist the will of his people?"

"That is a question," Sir Charles answered, "which of course I could not presume to answer. If, however, you

ask for my opinion, I should say that neither England nor France would permit such an interference."

John Peters nodded in a satisfied way. "I rather fancied," he remarked softly, "that you would say that. In fact, it was to hear you say something of the sort that I asked you to ride with me here. You should put these facts which I have given you before your government, and through it before France. If you take firm and concerted action, Germany will not dare to move a finger."

Sir Charles nodded. He had now heard all that he had been wanting to hear for the last week, and his future course of action was absolutely simple.

"You must allow me to take you home," John Peters said. "We are not far from the embassy."

"You are very good," Sir Charles replied. "I shall accept your offer with pleasure."

John Peters touched the electric bell and gave an order to the chauffeur. They swung off into the road. All the time Sir Charles was studying his companion curiously.

"If it does not sound impertinent, Prince," he said, "I should like to know exactly what is your position in this matter?"

"I am a well-wisher of the country," John Peters said. "I am quite prepared to accept my banishment and retire to private life. I fancy," he added with a smile, "that a

position where one's foibles and weaknesses were not so much under the public eye would suit me better."

"Under the circumstances," Sir Charles said, "I have no doubt that you are right. I am going now to cable to my government."

"Unofficially," John Peters said, "I should very much like to know the result of your cable."

"Unofficially," the ambassador answered, "I will come around and tell you."

CHAPTER XXVIII

JOHN PETERS rose from his chair, frowning slightly. A discreet man-servant ushered in his visitor, and immediately departed, closing the door.

He at first failed to recognize his visitor, who was small and petite, covered from head to foot in a long cloak, and heavily veiled. She came somewhat timidly toward him.

"Pardon me," he began, "I ——"

She raised her veil, and he broke off in his sentence.

"Marie!" he exclaimed. "Why, I thought you were dancing this evening. Why have you come here?"

He brought her a chair. She seemed indeed to need it. She was unusually pale, and there were dark lines under her eyes.

"I told them," she said, "that I was too ill to dance. I wanted to see you. I have something to tell you."

"Well?" he asked, more kindly, "is it anything so terribly serious?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Well, go on, then," he said reassuringly. "Tell me all about it."

Her fingers played with the buttons of her cloak. He

could see that they were shaking; he could see also the rapid rise and fall of her bosom.

"You know that my father ——" she began.

"Yes, I know," he interrupted, "I know that he is one of the — shall I call them anti-royalists? — and your brother, too. Well, what of it? I do not think the worse of them for that."

"But they are mad!" she exclaimed. "They know that you come to see me sometimes, and although it is very foolish they are very angry."

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. "My dear girl," he said, not unkindly, "surely I am not the only man who has ventured to admire you?"

"No, no!" she exclaimed; "it is not that. They know well enough all that there is to know about me, and yet, because it is you, and because you are the crown prince, they are angry. To-day I overheard them talking."

"Well?" he asked.

"They spoke of the king, and they spoke of you. They said that it had been decided that it would be unwise to let you live. They said that if you went away you would always be plotting to get back. I heard them say that it had been decided only last night that before the new Parliament met you should be assassinated."

"I have no doubt," John Peters said carelessly, "that some one will be idiotic enough to make the attempt, but

as you see, my dear child, one sometimes lives longest when one is most threatened."

His words sounded strong enough, and confident, but the girl was very little relieved. She leaned toward him.

"Why don't you go away at once," she whispered, "while there is time? You can do no good here. Nothing can save the country now. If you stay till the end you will not leave it at all. Why not go to Paris to-night, and — and ——"

John Peters laughed softly, and took her little hands in his for a moment. Then he let them go. "And take you, eh, little girl?" he said. "No; I cannot do that. My work here is not finished, will not be finished till the last moment. I must run my risks. After all, it will not be for very much longer."

She was paler than ever with anxiety. Her words, by their very impotence, seemed to mock her. "You think," she said, "that they would make a mistake; because you are strong they will not easily be able to kill you! Of what use are strength and courage against men who stab in the dark? You must go, indeed you must go."

"That," he answered gravely, "is out of the question. Like the more sentimental half of the world, you attach too much importance to life and death, little girl. If you were a man you would know what I mean. These things, after all, are relative states. It is better to be dead, and

to have done the work that lay before one, than to be wearing the mantle of an unworthy life. I must finish my work here, and whatever might happen to me, after all, does n't matter so very much. It must be done."

She burst into tears. "Oh! but it does matter," she sobbed. "If you do not care for yourself, how about those who are fond of you?"

"If they," he answered, "are the sort of people I would have them be, they would rather see me dead than have me save my skin by an unworthy flight."

"I am afraid," she said timidly, "that your friends are not all like that. I — oh, please!" she broke off suddenly, rising and seizing his hands. "Do go. Can't you guess why I beg it? I am afraid it is Albert who will ——"

He patted her on the cheek. "I understand," he said, "and you need not mind. Albert will only do, or try to do, his duty. Thank you for coming, little girl, and I promise that I will take all the care of myself that I possibly can, but I cannot leave the city yet."

She looked at him despairingly. "Then there is Bernhardt," she said. "He comes to see me every day. His spies are always outside my rooms. He asks me the same questions all the time. I am afraid he suspects."

"Suspects what?" John Peters asked.

"That you have been helping the man whom they call

the First Watcher," she answered slowly. "He has suspected something ever since the night when he broke in and found us together."

"You have been careful," John Peters said, "in all that you have told him?"

"I have told him nothing, because I know nothing," she answered. "Only ——"

"Only what?" he said encouragingly.

"He asked me whether you were indeed my lover, and I told him — what ought I to have told him?"

"That I am," he answered calmly.

"I told him so," she said. "I thought that you would not have taken all this trouble to make people believe that you are if you had not wished them to believe it."

"Quite right," John Peters said approvingly. "And now, Marie, I am going to send you away. You are sure that you are not dancing this evening?"

"Quite sure," she answered. "Indeed, I am not well enough. I have been frightened, and I am nervous."

"Then go to Bergman's," he said, "and let them know that we shall be there for supper at eleven o'clock. We will give the dear baron one more run for his money. I fancy it will be the last."

She raised her eyes to his for a moment, soft and full of unshed tears; then, as she dropped them, she caught his hand and kissed it. "I am glad," she said softly, "that

there is going to be one more evening, even though it is all make-believe."

"At eleven o'clock," he reminded her, smiling.

He touched a bell, and sent her away in the care of his own servant. Then he stood with folded arms on the hearth-rug, in front of a wood fire, thinking. This room of his was perhaps the plainest and least expensively furnished of any room at the palace. One side of it resembled a small armory. There were swords of different length and shape, revolvers, and a collection of sporting-guns. The rest of the room seemed taken up with books. The furniture was old, and a distinct smell of tobacco hung about the place. Yet there was a certain flavour of austerity which seemed not altogether out of keeping with the man himself, as he stood there with wrinkled forehead and close-drawn mouth, looking steadily through the walls, out of the room, into the heart of the city beyond. When at last he stirred, he rang a bell and summoned his servant.

"Tell them," he directed, "to have the plain motor ready for me in half an hour."

The man bowed and withdrew without change of countenance. Once outside the room, however, he kicked vigorously a small spaniel that came fawning about him. The plain motor meant that his master was going out incognito, and when that happened it usually meant a return by daylight.

CHAPTER XXIX

JOHN PETERS threw his fur overcoat into a chair, and strolled over toward the supper-table, where Marie was already awaiting him. She was dressed in plain black velvet, with a simple collar of pearls, and the severity of her toilet seemed to heighten the pallor of her cheeks and her general air of nervous ill-health.

"The table," she remarked, "is laid for three. There is no one else coming, is there?"

"I am not so sure," John Peters answered. "I sent a note to Bernhardt, asking him to join us."

She looked at him as though doubtful whether she had heard aright. "You mean Bernhardt, the commissioner of police?" she exclaimed, "the man who comes worrying me all the time about you?"

"The same," he answered.

"But what for?" she asked. "Why do you want him here? He will simply ask questions and watch, and watch, and watch. He thinks of nothing, he dreams of nothing, but that one purpose of his. I think that if he does not soon succeed he will go mad."

"What purpose do you mean?" John Peters asked.

"To discover the First Watcher," she answered. "That is what Bernhardt lives for, that is what I think he would be willing to die for. Even now I think he feels that if he should succeed before the next few days are over, he might still take a hand in the things that are going to happen."

John Peters twisted a cigarette and smiled. "Yes!" he said, "I fancied that Bernhardt felt something like that. That is one reason why I asked him to come here with us to-night."

"I do not understand," she murmured. "I only know that I would rather that we were alone, and I would rather that that man's eyes were not always following you and me."

He smiled as he sat down beside her. "We have played the game for months now," he said, "and we have not lost a trick. You are not afraid, little girl?"

"I have never been afraid," she answered. "I never should be, so long as you were with me."

"You do yourself less than justice," he said, "for you have held your own more than once against Bernhardt himself. I suppose," he asked, "he has tried to bribe you?"

"He has offered me a necklace," she answered.

John Peters nodded. "Well," he said, "I spent the other afternoon, or a part of it, looking through the old

crown jewels, and out of them I put on one side a necklace which the queens of Bergeland have worn for generations. It will come to you, Marie, in a day or two, and I think you will find that it will repay you for refusing anything which our friend Bernhardt has offered."

She did not seem unreasonably gratified. "It is very kind of you," she said, "but you know very well that, necklace or no necklace, the result would have been the same."

"You are a faithful little woman," he said, patting her hand lightly. "Some day I hope ——" He stopped short. She leaned forward and looked into his face.

"You hope what?" she whispered.

"That you may find somewhere the only thing there is in life worth having for a woman," he said, "a home and a husband and all the rest of it."

She drew away from him and laughed, a clear, hard little laugh. "I look like it, don't I?" she said. "I am afraid it is a little too late for wishes like that."

There was a knock at the door, and Bernhardt entered. Marie looked at him with eyes of fire, but John Peters, at least, was relieved at his coming. He held out his hand and showed him the vacant place at the table.

"Come," he said; "it may not be many times that I am

able to offer you hospitality. Sit down and sup with us. Marie and I have both had something to say to you for a long time."

Bernhardt came slowly over to them, and took the chair which his host was holding.

"I have rung for supper," John Peters said, "and the wine is already in the room. How goes it in the city?"

Bernhardt shrugged his shoulders. "Things might be worse," he said. "There are a few small bands of rioters going about, but there are whole armies of people who watch them with a smile, as though to say 'To-morrow it will be our turn!'"

"The time is short now," John Peters said, "a few days only, a few breathless days. The sooner they are past the better. Fill your glass, Bernhardt. The wine is good; do not be afraid of it."

"There are things going on outside the city," Bernhardt said slowly, "which puzzle one."

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. These were not the matters which he wished to discuss with his guest. "Look here, Bernhardt," he said, "it is you who are partly responsible for the state we are in. Do you realize that, my friend?"

"I should be a fool to admit it," Bernhardt answered, a little glumly.

"Yet in your heart you know very well," John Peters

said, "that if you had arrested one man six months ago the whole country would have been in a different position. Does n't every one say that it is the Watcher who has drawn the people together?"

Bernhardt nodded. "But I am not sure," he said, "that this wonderful person is not a myth. I have heard of such things before. I am coming to the conclusion that that man does not exist, but that one of the others cleverly plays his part, with a view to working on the imaginations of an impressionable people."

"That 's a fine theory," John Peters said, "but a theory it will remain. Drink your wine, Bernhardt, for I am going to tell you news. The Watcher does exist. I myself have met and spoken with him."

Bernhardt set down his glass slowly. His eyes were fixed upon the face of the other man. "You have seen him," he said, "and you let him go, the man at whose doors will lie the ruin of your kingdom?"

"I let him go," John Peters answered. "I know of no law that he has broken, and I imagine that what he has done he has done for the love of the people. I could not punish him, even if the worst happens."

"But we," Bernhardt said, "we might punish him. He has broken laws against us. He has covered us often with ridicule. He has caused the one failure of our police system. Come, help me, Prince. It is more to your

interests than to mine to show me where to lay my hands upon this man."

John Peters shook his head. "It would not be sporting," he answered; "but see here: A few days more or less make little difference to you, so long as the thing itself is in time. I promise you that in four days' time I will bring to you the man of whom you are talking. The only condition that I make is that you leave the search wholly in my hands; that for, say, three days you stand on one side and let me take your place. At the end of the three days I give you my word of honour as a gentleman that I will produce the man whom they have dubbed 'the Watcher.'"

If Bernhardt felt any surprise he did not show it. "How can you guarantee this, Prince?" he asked.

"My word," John Peters said, "is all I have to give. I do not think that you will require more of me."

"But if in three days," Bernhardt said, "why not now? Why not to-night? Why not bring him into this room?"

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he said, "he is not so easy to find as all that, and yet what I have told you is true. Are you content?"

"Naturally," Bernhardt answered; "but I need not promise that during these two or three days I will keep my eyes closed altogether. I might have an inspiration at any moment."

John Peters shrugged his shoulders. "That," he said, "is a different matter. I simply want you to abandon any practical efforts just while I am making my plans. I will bring him to you before the time I say. Now let us have done with these things for a time. Tell me whether you think republican Bergeland will still pay the price to see Miss Marie here dance?"

"Why not?" Bernhardt asked gallantly. "Kingdoms may come and go, but a woman who charms, charms always!"

She laughed in his face. "Ah, Baron," she said, "if one believed you always!"

They had finished supper and were smoking. Bernhardt glanced at his watch and rose. "I came," he said, "because this was an invitation which I could not refuse, but they need me out in the streets to-night. These small riots might break out at any moment into something momentous. Mademoiselle Marie, I kiss your hand. Prince, in four days I shall remind you of your promise."

He left them, and they stood in silence until they heard the echo of his footsteps die away. Then John Peters took up Marie's cloak and wrapped it round her slim little figure.

"I am coming home with you," he said. "There will be a meeting to-night, and afterward I may need your rooms."

She looked at him and sighed.

CHAPTER XXX

THERE were seven men who sat around a long table in apartment No. 12, and in the face of every one of them were signs of some unusual disturbance.

"I see," Levitt was saying, "but one thing to be done. These machinations with Germany are the work of the king and the crown prince. I say that this merits death. I am willing myself to accompany any one to the palace, to-night, to force our way in, if necessary, and to close once and for all this most miserable business."

"The palace is well guarded," another remarked.

"We can take a hundred or a thousand men if we choose," Levitt said, "and we can take our pick of them, but I believe that we should do better with a small party. Half the guards of the palace are on our side."

"I fear not, gentlemen," a voice said from the upper end of the room. "I fear that you are a little too sanguine. The king has changed his guard within the last twenty-four hours, dismissed fifty, and had one hundred fresh men brought in from his own regiment."

They had all risen to their feet. They had not expected their mysterious leader to-night.

"Are you sure of your information, sir?" Levitt asked curiously.

It seemed odd that this man, who had planned so cleverly the foundation of the new republic, had himself the entrée to the court, of which he was showing himself so bitter an enemy.

"I am quite sure," was the confident answer. "I should like to know, gentlemen, how you propose to reconcile such an attempt as you have been speaking of with our own bond."

"The circumstances," Levitt said, "have changed. The king is seeking outside aid."

"That is ancient history," their leader said, seating himself at the end of the table. "There is that danger to be faced, of course, but I can assure you that it is not so serious as you think. Germany is not so popular that all Europe will sit by and see her assume the protectorate of a country so rich as ours."

The professor leaned forward across the table. "Is this, sir," he asked, "a general remark, or do you speak from special knowledge?"

"I speak from absolute knowledge," was the quiet answer. "If you had bought an evening paper on the streets an hour ago you would have seen that the King of England returned this afternoon from Sandringham to attend a cabinet council, and that he afterward received

the French ambassador. That cabinet council was called in response to a long telegram sent from here to-day by Sir Charles Romford."

"You mean, then," the professor said, "that Germany will not be allowed to interfere?"

"I do mean that," was the answer. "If Germany persists there will be a European war, and for that I do not think Germany is at present quite prepared."

"If England and France," the professor said, "really intend to hold together in this, I think that our friend the Prince de Suess will have played his cards in vain."

"I," said the man at the other end of the table, "am already convinced of that. Now listen to me: After all that I have said as to the form which this revolution shall take, I come here to-night unexpectedly, and I find you calmly discussing a plan for assassination. I know, of course, that it is hard to keep in check the younger members of our party, but it has to be done, and I want you all to understand this, that if any move is made in the direction you speak of before Parliament has met and the committee whose names we have agreed upon have had their audience with the king, I not only resign my position among you, but you may find me on the other side. Is that understood?"

They all murmured assent.

"There are only three days more," their leader

continued. "Surely for that time you can curb your impatience! And, Grammont, remember this: If the king himself should go down to open Parliament, let nothing interfere with the usual etiquette and ceremony. Remember that a single false step at that time might make all the difference in the face of Europe as to how the new state of affairs here is looked upon. Everything must be done deliberately and with dignity. The members of the extreme party must be kept quiet. Arms are to be issued only to those men in whom you have confidence. Remember that, after all, arms are not necessary. There should be no fighting, because there will be no one to fight."

"You are sure of the army then?" Levitt asked.

"Quite, quite sure that they will never fire upon the people of Bergeland," was the answer. "The king and their own general believe that they will. They happen to be wrong. Are there any other matters on which you wish to consult me?"

There were none. The whole plan of action for the next few days had been so elaborately drawn up and revised that there was indeed little to do but to sit and wait. For a few moments there was silence in the room. Then, at the sound of shouting in the street, several of them went to the window. In the street below a crowd of men were marching along, unarmed, and apparently harmless enough, but singing a patriotic hymn in many keys, and

boldly waving banners and flags emblazoned with the motto "Freedom for Bergeland!" No one attempted to interfere with them. Many of the passers-by even turned and joined their ranks. They swept on toward the heart of the city, and the men who had been watching them turned back into the room.

"So long as they are allowed to shout," Grammont remarked dryly, "they will do very little mischief, and there is no one bold enough to prevent their shouting themselves hoarse if they please."

It was past one o'clock when the crown prince entered the crowded reception-rooms of Madame de Sayers. He found Grace with some difficulty. She was talking to Bernhardt and the Russian ambassador, and there was a distinct hesitation in her manner before she accepted his arm.

"Tell me what is the matter?" he asked, as they walked away.

"You are late for one thing," she answered, glancing at the clock. "I had almost given you up."

"For that," he said, "I will make my excuses presently. What else is there?"

"You had supper with Baron Bernhardt, he tells me, at the Café Bergman."

"It is true," he admitted. "What else?"

"Who was your other companion?"

"No one," he answered, "of whom I can talk to you."

"Then why were you there?" she asked.

"Ask Bernhardt," he answered, "why he was there."

She shook her head. "Baron Bernhardt's movements," she said, "do not interest me, nor have I any right to inquire into them. With you it is different. That third person was" — she hesitated perceptibly — "a lady!"

"Quite true," he admitted.

"Then I should like to know," she asked, "why you were having supper at the Café Bergman with a lady, when you ought to have been here?"

He tried to take her hand, but she kept it withheld. "Grace," he said, "you ask me these things three days too soon. It is not my wish that there should be any secrets between us. Very soon there shall be none. Very soon I can explain to you a great deal about myself and my doings which must seem incomprehensible now, but until those three days have passed there is a seal upon my lips. Will you trust me?"

She looked searchingly into his face. "I am willing to take so much on trust," she said; "but a supper-party at a café of bad reputation, the very hour that you ought to have been with me! Am I really to wait three days to understand this, too?"

"If you please, Grace," he answered.

She sighed, and tightened a little her clasp upon his arm. "Well," she said, "I suppose I am as great an idiot as all the rest of my sex, and do what I am told. For three days, then, but after that I want you to understand that there will be no more supper-parties without me."

"It is a promise," he answered, smiling, "but by that time the necessity for it will have passed. By the by, Grace," he added, looking around, "can you tell me if Monsieur de Courcelle is here to-night — the French ambassador?"

She motioned with her fan a little to the right. "He is sitting there with Sir Charles Romford. They have been talking for nearly an hour."

John Peters looked thoughtfully across at the two men. "Let me take you to your aunt, Grace," he said. "I should like to go and join in that conversation. It looks as though it might be interesting."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE following morning most of the newspapers published in Varia contained an item of news which a good many people found somewhat surprising. Madame de Sayers threw her paper impatiently from her with a little exclamation of anger.

"I never heard anything so wicked," she declared. "One could scarcely believe that he would be such a coward."

"Of whom are you talking, aunt?" Grace asked.

"Of the crown prince, my dear."

Grace flinched for a moment, and looked up with startled eyes. "What has he done?" she demanded.

"Stolen off to Paris to escape from this trouble," Madame de Sayers answered contemptuously. "Why, the old king has twice his pluck, after all. He does n't mean to turn out until he is forced out."

"I think," Grace said quietly, "that there must be some mistake. I talked with the prince last night, and he did not say a word about leaving Varia."

"Nevertheless he has gone," Madame De Sayers said dryly. "You will find it in all the papers. To-night I

suppose he will be holding one of his usual revels up in the Montmartre. Upon my word, royalist though I am, I scarcely wonder at the people being democrats."

Bernhardt, too, heard the news, and he drove at once to the palace. The king received him, but he was obviously in an irritable temper.

"I know nothing about John," he declared, "except that if he has really gone and left me here to see this thing through alone I shall never want to see him back again, however things go."

"You don't know why he went?" Bernhardt asked.

"I have no idea," the king answered, "unless it was that he found the climate of Varia becoming a little too sultry. I am disappointed. I never thought he was a coward."

"Nor do I now," Bernhardt answered, "but I should very much like to know what he has gone to Paris for."

The Prince de Suess arrived soon, speeding in his fastest motor-car, and praying for an instant interview with the king. Bernhardt took his departure.

"Your Majesty," the German ambassador said, "we do not understand this sudden journey of the crown prince's. We are told that he has gone to Paris. Will you forgive me if I ask whether this is the truth, and if it is the truth, whether his visit there has any political significance?"

"You all know more about my nephew than I do myself," the king answered pettishly. "I saw him last night, and he never told me that he was going. As he left without even saying farewell, I think you may take it for granted that his visit anywhere could have no political significance. At the same time it puts me in a very awkward position."

"Your Majesty's assurance," the ambassador said, "is gratifying. At the same time I am sorry that the crown prince should have left us just now. If he was uneasy because of the troubles that are threatening, I think that you and I together could have reassured him."

"I wish I felt as confident," the king said anxiously. "After all, you know, it 's going to take your men four or five hours to reach the city, and a good deal can be done in that time by a mob well led."

"They shall arrive in time," the Prince de Suess said. "I myself will take care of that, but I can't help wishing that the crown prince had not gone to Paris. By the by, did you notice that the King and Queen of England are also there incognito? They left London quite unexpectedly yesterday morning."

"I have not read the papers," the king answered, "but you are not presuming, I suppose, that there is any connection between the crown prince's journey to Paris and the arrival there of the King and Queen of England?"

"Personally, I am sure of it," the prince answered. "At the same time I do not think my master will care to read about this visit just now."

"If your master knew my nephew as well as I do," the king answered, "he would be spared any uneasiness he might feel."

The Prince de Suess, however, was still thoughtful. "May I inquire of your Majesty, without seeming impertinent," he asked, "whether he has seen anything of Sir Charles Romford during the last few days?"

"Sir Charles has called here twice, and has written requesting an audience," the king answered. "I guessed what it meant, however, and declined to see him."

"Your Majesty has acted with the greatest discretion," the ambassador said. "One cannot be too careful in these matters. There is really no occasion why any one of the powers should object to us, your nearest neighbour, showing our good will by lending you a little temporary aid. But you know what insular jealousy is, and, so far as regards France, we have but to stretch ourselves and she flies to arms. I noticed in the papers this morning that the Channel Squadron has joined the North Sea Fleet, and is cruising there, and there are rumours of French troops being moved up to the frontier. Of course these things may mean nothing. One can do no more than be prepared. By the by, does your Majesty know whether there

has been any friendship between your nephew and Sir Charles?"

"Most unlikely, I should think," the king answered. "Sir Charles is something of a puritan and a good deal of a prig, and his worst enemies could not call my nephew either. I never saw them together in my life."

"And yet," the German remarked, with a fresh note of anxiety in his tone, "I heard that they were driving together the day before yesterday in the crown prince's automobile."

The king shrugged his shoulders. "If you worry over every trifle, my dear prince," he said, "you will never have a happy moment. So far as regards my nephew, let me assure you once and for all that he is at heart an idle, dissolute rascal, and his journey to Paris has no more to do with the political situation here than my lighting this cigarette."

The Prince de Suess bowed low. "Your Majesty is reassuring," he declared, and took his leave.

Baron Bernhardt went that afternoon to pay his respects to Madame de Sayers, and at the first opportunity sat down beside Grace. By daylight she was certainly as beautiful as he had expected to see her, but her cheeks were pale, and there were very faint velvet lines underneath her eyes.

"So," he remarked carelessly, "the breaking up here

has commenced. After the other night I was inclined to give the crown prince credit for more pluck."

"You think, then," she asked, "that his journey to Paris means flight?"

Bernhardt shrugged his shoulders. "What else can one think, my dear young lady?" he said. "If a journey to Paris within two days of our great crisis here is not flight, what is it?"

She looked steadily away from him for several moments. "Of course," she said, "I am almost a stranger here, and I know nothing about the matter at all, but I wondered for the moment whether he had not gone there with some political scheme in his mind."

Bernhardt shook his head. "Has he ever said anything to you," he asked simply, "which would lead you to suppose that he had any idea of undertaking such a journey?"

Grace looked at him coldly. "You could scarcely expect me," she said, "considering the length of our acquaintance, to be in the crown prince's confidence."

Bernhardt took his leave a few minutes afterward. He had found out quite as much as he expected. The girl was hurt by this sudden flight of the crown prince, and she had not the least intention of discussing it with him or anybody else. If she knew anything it was her own secret, but it was very certain that his disappearance was

as much a surprise to her as to any of the others. He went back to his office and called a subordinate.

"Put me on the long-distance telephone to Paris," he ordered. "I want to speak to Ricorde."

There was half an hour's delay, during which Bernhardt studied carefully a pile of papers which lay on the desk before him. Then there came a tinkle of the telephone bell close to his elbow.

"You are through to Paris, sir," his subordinate told him.

Bernhardt held the receiver to his ear and waited. Presently he heard a familiar voice:

"This is Ricorde. Who wants me?"

"Bernhardt. Did you get my first message?"

"Yes."

"Your man met the train at the Gare du Nord?"

"Yes."

"Where did our friend go?"

"To the Hotel Ritz," the voice answered. "He stayed there for half an hour only, and then went into the Café de Paris for lunch."

Bernhardt smiled. This was not very much like serious business, he thought. "Did he send any notes from the hotel?" he asked.

"One," the voice answered.

"To whom was it addressed?"

"George Harringdon, at the British embassy."

Bernhardt nearly dropped the receiver. "The King of England is there, is he not?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Your man is still following our friend, I suppose?"

"Certainly, but he left for lunch only an hour ago. There has been no further report since."

"Pass them through to me as you get them," Bernhardt ordered. "This is important."

He rang off, and remained for a few moments deep in thought. Then he rose from his seat and from a drawer on the other side of the table he took out half a dozen photographs, all of the crown prince, in different attitudes. Then he laid a small coin upon the face of each, and studied them carefully, taking note of the different attitudes, the droop of the hands, the carriage of the head whose features were hidden. He rose to his feet and walked to the window.

"If this should be true!" he muttered. "In a way it is not impossible, and yet, let me think. Yes, the supper-party in Paris, which the papers pilloried, took place on exactly the same date as we knew for certain that the Watcher presided over one of the meetings here. The same man could not be in Paris and in Varia the same evening, and yet I believe ——"

He stopped short, and swept the photographs back into

the drawer. He composed himself to work again for half an hour. Then there came again the tinkle of the telephone bell at his elbow.

"Is that Bernhardt?" the voice asked.

"Yes," Bernhardt answered.

"Can you recognize who I am?"

Bernhardt knew at once that this was not Ricorde. He became deeply interested. "I neither know who you are," he said, "nor where you are speaking from."

"Well, I will tell you," the voice answered. "I am John Valentine, Prince of Varia, and I want to know what the devil you mean by having me followed around Paris by your infernal spies?"

"And I want to know," Bernhardt answered, "what the devil you mean by running away just before the fight, and leaving us to see it through without you!"

There was an instant's silence. One could fancy that the man at the distant end of the telephone stood there smiling at these words.

"My coming or my staying," the voice remarked, "is my own affair. Varia is neither the richer nor the poorer; but I do object to this surveillance, especially now I am in another country. I want to warn you that if I can get my hands on your man, I shall thrash him within an inch of his life."

"If he is fool enough," Bernhardt answered, "to let

you catch him, you can do what you like with him. By the by, will you answer me a question?"

"One," the voice answered. "Be quick!"

"What was in that note you sent to the English Embassy this morning?"

"It contained," the voice answered, "an invitation to luncheon."

"The invitation was accepted?" Bernhardt asked.

"Naturally," the voice answered.

"Let it go at that."

"Is there any fresh news in Varia?"

"None," Bernhardt answered. "When are you coming back?"

"That depends," the voice answered, "on a good many things."

"Your luncheon party was a success?"

"That, too, depends," the voice replied, "on a good many things. Remember what I have told you. I have had enough of being spied upon and watched wherever I go, and then being told that it is for my own good. If I catch hold of your man I shall break his head."

"There is one thing more I want to ask you," Bernhardt began. "Hang it, don't disconnect us!" he shouted, but he was too late. The person at the other end of the line had rung off.

CHAPTER XXXII

"DO I understand, Prince, that you have come to Paris purposely to see me?"

"To see you, sir, and Monsieur Fayes," John Peters answered. "The situation, which I have tried to make clear to you, seemed to me a sufficiently serious reason for my coming. Unless something is done within a week, Germany will practically have established a protectorate over my country. It is for you others, who are interested in retaining at its normal position the balance of power in Europe, to say whether it is wise to allow one country, in so short a time, and with practically no expenditure of arms or wealth, to increase her resources so vastly."

The personage whom John Peters was addressing with such marked respect leaned a little forward in his easy chair.

"You appear to me," he said, "to accept, so far as you personally are concerned, the loss of your prospective kingdom without a complaint. You, I understand, do not wish for help from any one to enable you to retain the monarchy? You prefer to let things take their course?"

"I do, sir," John Peters answered. "Bergeland has been the most misgoverned country in Europe for many years. Nothing but her splendid resources and the indomitable spirit of her people have kept her in the forefront of the smaller nations. But now the people are thoroughly aroused. The result of our election shows clearly what they want, and what they want I think they have a right to possess. Personally, I am content to let the republic come, and I believe that under its rule Bergeland will increase as no other country in Europe has increased for generations. All that I am here to ask for is that something be done — and you, sir, can do it — to nullify my uncle's unfortunate mistake."

The personage drummed idly with his fingers upon the arm of his easy chair, and looked across at their third companion. "You hear what the prince says, Monsieur Fayes," he said. "Have you anything to suggest?"

Monsieur Fayes was deliberate but unhesitating. "Sir," he said, "if war there must be, there has never been a cause more worthy of it. You ask me now for my personal feeling, and therefore I speak, not as the representative of the French nation, but as I shall speak to my government within the next few hours. I say that under no circumstances should we permit a single German regiment to cross the frontier of Bergeland. We must not content ourselves with idle protests. Your warships

must command the North Sea, and our troops must be rushed toward the southern frontier. Our ultimatum must be definite and final. We will not have German influence over Bergeland."

"I am inclined, Monsieur Fayes," the personage said, "to agree with you. I am inclined, also, to agree with our friend here, though of course we must both sympathize deeply with him. I believe that the people of a country have a right to declare how they shall be governed, and if the people have sent a great majority to Parliament to say that theirs shall be a republic, then I do not see how any foreign nation has a right to intervene for one moment with a view to opposing the will of that people."

John Peters rose to his feet. "Then my mission is ended, sir," he said. "I have lost a day here already through finding you in the country. I have a special train waiting at the Gare du Nord, and if you will allow me to take my leave I shall be glad."

The personage looked at him a little curiously. "You are going back to Varia?" he asked.

"By all means," John Peters answered. "I hope to arrive there some time to-night."

"Is there any particular object in your return?" the personage asked. "You must remember that changes of such magnitude as are now impending in your country are not conducted without a certain amount of danger to people

in your position. You can do no good there, I imagine. Don't you think it would be wiser to anticipate your exile?"

John Peters smiled. "Sir," he said, "you yourself would not, I know, dream of being absent from your country at such a crisis, even if your being there entailed a small amount of personal risk. As it is, I suspect I have been jeered at by every paper in the country. They probably imagine that I have fled in fear of my life, and I have not been at any time a popular person in Varia. No, I must go back and face the end, whatever it may be."

"You are right, without a doubt, Prince," the personage answered, holding out his hand. "I wish you the best of fortune, and if the worst happens, remember that there are more unpleasant countries in the world than England for a man who has your love of sport."

"I shall not forget it, sir," John Peters answered.

"I might also suggest," Monsieur Fayes said, smiling, "that my own city has claims for your favourable notice, but I fancy there is little I could tell you about that which you do not know."

John Peters bowed low to hide his smile, and hurried away. A motor-car was waiting for him outside. He sprang in and was driven rapidly to the Gare du Nord. In less than twenty minutes the special train, with a fourteen hours' run before it, was steaming rapidly northward.

Varia was curiously gay on those few nights before the storm, as though in defiance of the growing political disturbance which throbbed throughout the city. The doors of the palace were thrown open for a great reception, while the special train which carried John Peters was still flying northward. All Varia seemed to be there, every one anxious to talk to every one else, to exchange rumours, to hear the very latest news. Only once during the evening did the Prince de Suess leave his place by the king's side, and that was when he sought out Grace Pellisier, and begged her to honour him with a turn in the winter-gardens.

"And do you, too, Miss Pellisier," he asked, "feel like these others, that this is the calm before the great storm, or perhaps you, like me, think that some of us are inclined to exaggerate the gravity of the political situation?"

"I know nothing whatever about it," Grace answered. "I am a stranger in this country."

"But you are a native of Varia?" he asked.

"My mother was," she answered, "but I have lived all my life in America and England."

"I have seen you talking with the crown prince," he remarked. "People here seem to think his flight somewhat extraordinary."

"His what?" she asked.

"His flight, I said," was the reply. "Perhaps you are among those who believe that he will come back?"

Then it occurred to her that this man had some reason for seeking her out. He looked to her like the sort of man who would have a reason for everything he did. The indignant words which had trembled upon her lips remained unspoken.

"Really," she said, "I have seen so little of the crown prince that I could not tell what he would be likely to do under any circumstances. At the palace the other night he did not seem to be the sort of man to run away from anything."

"He is no coward," the ambassador said. "I imagine that if he has gone for good it is because he is a sensible fellow, and he thinks that a week's holiday in Paris will be better than an exceedingly unpleasant, not to say dangerous, week here. All the same, I am not one of those who believe in this coming revolution."

"You think that it will be checked," she asked, "by the army, perhaps?"

He smiled coldly. "I am afraid," he said, "that the army alone is scarcely a factor in the situation. It seems to me one of those times when if a nation has friends they must assert themselves."

She stifled an imaginary yawn. "Ah!" she said, "if

only I knew something about politics I am sure I should find them most interesting."

He took the hint, and at once offered his arm. They moved between the palms toward the great hall in which the reception was held, and from which the ballroom led, and, face to face with them, coming down the room, walking more than usually erect, and gorgeous in the wonderful uniform of the Bergeland Guards, met the one man whom they least expected to see, John Peters!

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE Prince de Suess, hardened diplomat though he was, for once betrayed his astonishment. He stopped short and stared open-eyed at the approaching man. The change in Grace, however, was still more marked. Her pallor disappeared as though by magic. She held herself more erect, as though suddenly her self-respect had been mysteriously and delightfully reinforced, and the welcome which flashed for a moment from her eyes was so wonderful a thing that, had any other seen it save him for whom it was intended, her secret must surely have been known.

"Ah!" John Peters exclaimed, bowing low and taking her hands, "I have been looking for you. Glad to see you, Prince. It is a relief to find that we are still in a position to dispense hospitalities to our friends."

The German bowed a little stiffly. "Prince," he said, "permit me to welcome you home again. Your journey has been a rapid one, but I trust none the less pleasant."

John Peters nodded carelessly. "Ah!" he said, "all the world seems to know that I have been over

to Paris for a few hours. That is the worst of this modern press."

"The weather there was, I trust, agreeable?" De Suess asked politely.

"Cold but dry," John Peters answered. "I found it pleasant enough. I had so many small things to attend to, and such a very little time to give to them, that I certainly had no leisure to feel cold."

"Paris," De Suess remarked, "is gay these days."

"Paris," John Peters replied, "is always that."

"You were fortunate enough to see something of his Majesty, the King of England?" De Suess asked carelessly.

"I could scarcely leave the city without paying my respects," John Peters said. "Come, Miss Pellisier, don't tell me that you have had supper. I arrived an hour ago, and I am starving. May I not have the honour? De Suess will forgive us, I am sure."

The German bowed stiffly and turned away. He hurried to the king. "Your Majesty," he said, "the crown prince has returned!"

"What of it?" the king asked irritably. "Everyone comes worrying me about John. First of all they were amazed because he went away, and now they are astonished because he has come back. I myself do not care one pin whether he is here or there, only I know very well that if I

were in his shoes, and had breakfasted in Paris this morning, it would have taken a good deal to induce me to sup here to-night."

"That is all very well, your Majesty," De Suess said, "but I do not understand this visit of the crown prince's. I do not understand what he went for. Listen, I do not think any of us understands the crown prince himself."

"You think he is plotting for the throne?" the king asked, looking up with narrowing eyes.

"No, I do not think that," the German answered, "but I do believe that he is plotting for something. The King of England is in Paris, the one man whom we must take by surprise when we rush our troops here to your aid. The crown prince went to see him, I am sure. What for? What did he tell him?"

The king was now himself alarmed. "My dear prince," he said, "you do not for a moment believe that anyone would interfere to prevent your lending me your help? Why, without you I believe they would butcher me in the palace. I am relying upon your rushing your troops up to the city."

"Your Majesty," De Suess said, "that was the arrangement we made. My master is willing enough to save your country for you. It is simply a matter of exercising an army corps, no more; but there always was one danger. When England and France whisper together, they see

things in the air which exist nowhere but in their imaginations, and it is always round Germany and about Germany that they have their foolish dreams. France and England are together at this moment, whispering. It seems to me that uncomfortable things may come of it."

"You cannot mean," the king said, "that they would interfere to prevent your helping me?"

"I think it more than probable," the German answered. "I think that if this wonderful nephew of yours has been thrusting his clumsy finger into the pie, he may have undone all the good work which you and I have built up. Send for him, your Majesty, at once. It is necessary that we should know exactly how we stand. Remember that to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock we are to seize the railway lines, so as to rush our men into the capital."

"I will send for him," the king answered. "There is Bernhardt, there. He shall go. Bernhardt, have you heard that the crown prince has returned?"

Bernhardt bowed low. He alone, perhaps, in Varia, had known when that special train left the Gare du Nord. "Yes, I knew, your Majesty," he answered. "He is in the supper-room now with the niece of Madame de Sayers."

"Fetch him for me," the king demanded. "De Suess and I will be in my room. Tell him to come at once."

Bernhardt bowed, and hurried away to execute his mission.

The supper-room was crowded, but everyone fell back before the crown prince and his companion. They passed beyond into the reserved suite of rooms, and seated themselves before a small table. For the first few minutes they were surrounded by waiters, and John Peters did not hesitate to prove himself what he declared he was, a starving man. When everything was served, however, he whispered to a groom of the chambers, and the waiters melted away as though by magic.

"Well," he asked, looking at her with a smile, "did you think that I had run away?"

"Not I!" she answered proudly. "But tell me, why did you go without a word?"

"I went," he answered, "on a moment's impulse, because I felt that it was the best, and indeed the only thing to do. Don't ask me many questions. I think that in these days the less one knows the better. But I may tell you this, that I believe my visit was successful, and will undo a great deal of the mischief which this wretched plotting between my uncle and De Suess has brought about."

"De Suess," she told him, "is very uncomfortable. He has been trying to pump me."

John Peters smiled, as he attacked a dish of chicken mayonnaise. "I know exactly what is happening," he said. "As soon as we left him he rushed off to my uncle. In a minute or two's time a messenger will come to say that

my uncle desires my immediate presence, and then the fat will be in the fire."

"Shall you tell them everything?" she asked.

"I think not," he answered. "On the other hand, I am not at all sure that the entire truth would not be best. However, I think I shall trust to inspiration. Grace, you are eating nothing."

"I am looking at you," she answered; "it is so good to have you back again."

He laughed quietly. "I am one of the sort of men," he said, "who don't get lost. I have a knack of turning up again. To tell you the truth, I am even rash enough to believe that I shall be eating supper to-morrow night also, although I believe half the inhabitants of Varia doubt it."

She shuddered. "It is horrible," she said, "to think that there really is danger. After all, I am not sure that I do not wish you had stayed away."

"I can't believe that," he declared. "If I did you would not be the Grace who found her way so quickly into my heart."

"I suppose not," she admitted, "and yet, when it comes to a real struggle between a question of honour and the safety of the person you love — well, it is a pull, is n't it?"

"It is when one only thinks about it," he answered, "but when the time comes and the circumstances occur, one

generally, I think, chooses the right. Inspiration is such a divine gift. See, this is exactly what I expected."

It was Bernhardt who stood before them, ushered in by the protesting groom of the chambers. "Prince," he said, "I am sorry indeed to intrude, but his Majesty desires your immediate presence in his room."

John Peters nodded. "His Majesty, I presume," he said, "is closeted with the Prince de Suess?"

"The Prince de Suess was certainly with him," Bernhardt admitted, "when I came away."

John Peters looked round the table with a sigh of regret. "And I was so hungry!" he declared.

Grace laughed softly. "I don't think," she said, "that I shall sympathize very much with you. Considering that we have been here only a few minutes, I think you have managed fairly well."

He rose to his feet. "Let me take you back to Madame de Sayers," he said, "or shall I leave you with Bernhardt?"

"If Miss Pellisier will honour me," Bernhardt said, offering his arm.

She hesitated a moment and then accepted it. John Peters buckled on his sword and walked out of the room. Bernhardt watched him with a curious light in his eyes and a curious parting of the lips.

"I think," he said, "that our friend is going to have a very interesting quarter of an hour."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE small retiring-room in which the king and De Suess were impatiently awaiting the crown prince was practically only a recess curtained off from the larger apartment. When John Peters lifted the curtains, he brought with him the soft flow of the music, and the murmur of conversation from a hundred tongues.

"You wish to speak to me?" he said, looking at the king.

"I do," the king answered sharply. "We have some questions to ask you, De Suess and I."

John Peters looked at De Suess as though for the first time aware of his presence. "Very well," he said, "I am here and at your service. May I smoke? I have had a long journey. I had no time in Paris to buy cigarettes."

"It is about that visit of yours to Paris," the king said, "that we wish to talk."

De Suess intervened. "Your Majesty," he said, "the questions which you wish to put to his Royal Highness are of a somewhat intimate nature. Would it not be well if we chose a more retired spot?"

"We will go into the library," the king said. "Come this way, both of you."

They left the room and passed down a long corridor, close to the spot where scaffolding and screens still hid the partly repaired breach in the walls. The library itself was apart from the large reception-room, and was almost in darkness. A servant turned on the electric lights, and was immediately dismissed. The king closed the door, and the three men walked toward the table, at which was placed the king's favourite easy chair. He did not wait to sit down, however, but turned at once upon his nephew.

"Now, sir," he said, "I will tell you why we have sent for you. We want to understand exactly the reason for your journey to Paris."

John Peters was standing with his back to the fireplace and his face to the curtained windows. For several moments he made no reply, and the longer they looked into his face the more their fear increased that those things at which De Suess had hinted were really true. The light smile and the indifferent manner with which John Peters was wont to baffle questioners and to preserve his pose as a philanderer were gone. He looked toward that window as though his eyes were indeed able to see out beyond into the great city. He had the air of a man confronted with a crisis, and engaged in the deliberate task of shaping in his mind great resolutions. The lines in his face no longer had any semblance to lines of dissipation. It was the face of a man of thought and action into which the king and

De Suess were looking so anxiously, and his tone when he spoke, firm and unwavering, was like the voice of a man of his own mind, master of his thoughts, master of the whole situation.

"Well," he said, "I see no reason why I should not tell you. In a few hours" — he glanced toward the great clock which ticked slowly in the corner of the room — "Bergeland will be face to face with its fate. You may as well know now what you will certainly discover before very long, and so far as you, sir, are concerned," he added, turning to the king, "it is perhaps better that you should be prepared."

The king had turned very pale, his eyes had narrowed, and his lips had parted, a habit of his when in fear or anger. "Go on, sir!" he commanded.

John Peters bowed. "I have been to Paris," he said, "as you and the Prince de Suess seem to have surmised, on a mission concerned with the projected events of to-morrow. As a matter of fact, I have had an interview with the French President and the Duke of Lancaster."

The king spoke softly, but it was the softness of a man who has lost control of his voice. "By what right, sir," he said, "have you dared to interfere with my plans?"

"I have interfered," John Peters said, "not as crown prince, but as a citizen of Bergeland. You, sir, have become a tool in the hands of this man. You have

encouraged him to ask for aid from his master toward preserving for you the throne of this country. If you have done this with a view of insuring your personal safety, let me assure you of this from my own knowledge—that the day this country is overrun with foreign troops at your instigation, that day will most surely be the day of your death. In seeking to destroy your plans, I am indirectly saving your life. Facts are facts. The kingdom of Bergeland is lost to you and to me to-morrow. If you play the part of a wise man you can go, and all Europe is open to you; but if the Germans once even approach this city, there is no power on earth which can save your life or mine."

The king, despite himself, was a little impressed by words spoken with so much conviction, by a person whom he had deemed incapable of them. He did not immediately reply. Not so, De Suess, however, who saw slipping away from him the great chance which was to have won for him the undying regard of his master.

"All that the crown prince has said," he declared angrily, "I deny. This rising which you speak of as being so inevitable is, after all, but an affair of the mob, easily checked with a few thousand soldiers and a firm hand. If you, sir," he added, turning toward the crown prince, "are coward enough to throw away your destiny, and to abandon your country to hopeless misrule, you at least

have not the right to involve his Majesty here, who has the courage to face the storm, in your paltry schemes. Twenty-four hours after your Parliament has met, and issued, as I presume it will issue, its amazing mandate to the king, I guarantee that it shall not only retract it, but also give an undertaking that nothing of the sort shall happen in the future. That twenty-four hours, it is true, may be a time of misrule in the city, but the king's safety has been my first thought. He will take shelter at my embassy, and I guarantee that not all the rioters in this city shall drag him thence."

John Peters smiled. "An edifying sight," he remarked, "to see the King of Bergeland seeking shelter from his people in a foreign embassy! You are deceived, Prince de Suess, or you deceive yourself. This is no rising of a mob which will take place to-morrow; it is the deliberate rising of a great people, claiming their right to be governed justly and liberally, as we have never governed them. I can promise you, and I know something of the matter, that they will not be terrorized by a few regiments of German soldiers. They will fight, if need be, until these streets run red with blood. It is that terrible calamity which I am determined to prevent."

"Suppose you tell us, sir, how you mean to intervene?" the king asked, in a low tone.

"I have laid the whole matter," John Peters said,

"before the two persons whose names I have mentioned. Their views, I am glad to find, are mine. They are determined not to permit the intervention of your country, sir" — turning toward De Suess — "with our affairs. To-night cables are flashing all over Europe. The English North Sea squadron sails at daybreak with sealed orders, and as I came by, all the garrison towns in the north of France were wakened up and busy. If Bergeland is worth the price, Prince de Suess, you may still strike your blow, but to-morrow morning your master will know the cost of striking it. It will be war with England and France."

There was a prolonged silence between the three men. Then De Suess moved toward the door with a low bow.

"Your Majesty," he said, turning to the king, "I have done my best for you in this time of peril, and I was prepared to carry out my word to the uttermost letter, and to insure your safety. What may happen now I cannot tell. You must look upon my pledges as for the time retracted. It is for my master to say what he will do. If disaster comes to this country, there is the man," he added, pointing to John Peters, "whom you will have to thank."

The king had sunk into his easy chair. He looked like a man broken by some unexpected blow; even his first fit of anger had died away.

"For what I have done," John Peters said calmly, "I

am perfectly willing to take the whole responsibility, both now and in the future. If the history of these events is ever written, it will, I think, be plain enough that what I have done I have done for the good of Bergeland. You, sir," he added, turning once more toward the king, "have done great things in your life, whatever your historian may say of your rule over this people. You would not have it written that when danger came you sought to save the few years of life, which are all you can hope for, by hiding from your angry people in the house of a foreigner! Take my advice, sir. Do as I shall do. Stay here and face them. If any come here with the mandate of the country behind them, to ask us questions, or even to tell us their will, let us meet them like men and answer them like men. Whatever our battles may be, let us fight them ourselves. I presume that even for your sake, sir, Germany will not run the risk of war with two powers as great as herself."

De Suess looked back from the threshold. "That, sir," he answered, "remains to be seen."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE departure of De Suess was followed almost immediately by the arrival of the groom of the chambers.

"Your Majesty," he announced, "Baron Bernhardt urgently desires one minute's audience on affairs of a serious nature."

The king looked as though he had not understood. John Peters crossed to his side and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Sir," he said kindly, "I am afraid these things have upset you. Let me send for Doctor Reich to sit with you for a little time, and allow me to attend to anything necessary."

The king made a little motion of his head which might have signified assent. His nephew sent the servant away with a message for the doctor, and remained until he arrived.

"His Majesty is a little tired," John Peters said to the doctor. "I think he requires a stimulant. Please remain with him until I return."

Bernhardt was waiting in the corridor outside. He

drew John Peters to one side and dropped his voice to a whisper. "Your Highness," he said, "it is not safe for your guests to remain a moment longer. I have reports coming in every minute from all over the city. Everywhere there is rioting, and though a large number of the people seem to be endeavouring with might and main to establish order, yet in many quarters the mobs have the upper hand. The square outside is almost packed. A torchlight procession has just gone by, singing some infernal republican hymn, and they tell me that already two carriages leaving here have been stopped. The people are panic-stricken. No one knows what to do."

John Peters thought for a moment. "Come with me," he said, and led the way to his own private room. Here he locked the door and sat down before the telephone. He called for a number and mentioned a name, at which Bernhardt looked up in surprise. An answer came almost immediately.

"I am speaking," John Peters asked, "to Grammont?"

"Yes," came the answer. "Who are you?"

"Listen, Grammont," John Peters continued. "Do you recognize my voice as I am speaking to you now? I have sat within a few feet of you many a time, although on those occasions you have never seen my face."

"I know who you are," came the faint answer. "Go on!"

"I call upon you," John Peters said, "to remember our compact. The palace is full now of guests who dare not leave it because the streets are thronged with revolutionaries. You have, I know, twenty thousand men, ready armed, and entrained for the German frontier. They will not be needed. I have seen to that. Germany will not move. You accept my word in this matter?"

"We have never failed to accept your word in any matter," was the answer.

"Then marshal those men yourself," John Peters said firmly. "Hold the streets from the Palace Place to the Boulevard du Bois, and see that no carriage which leaves the palace is challenged, and that these people are allowed to go to their homes safely. You can do this?"

"Yes, I can do it," came the answer. "In an hour's time I promise that the streets shall be safe."

"You are a wise man, Grammont," John Peters answered. "If we do not meet again, remember these last words to you, even though they come from where you do not know. We have the chance to teach the world a great lesson. Human life is a thing as sacred as freedom itself. Try and make the people understand this. Punish rioting or any form of excess the moment it occurs. Police every street with men on whom you can rely, and whom we shall not need now for any other purpose. Remember our motto — A bloodless revolution!'"

John Peters rose from the telephone. Bernhardt was looking at him as a man who sees a ghost.

"I know," he cried, "I know now! This is wonderful!"

John Peters smiled. "You nearly caught me more than once," he said, "but I always had luck on my side."

"But these people, Grammont, Levitt, the professor, the whole committee, they must have guessed," said Bernhardt.

"Not once," John Peters answered. "It was not so difficult. I won my leadership with the pen, and not one of them has ever seen my face at any of our meetings. My voice it was easy enough to disguise. For the rest, what supposition could have seemed so wild as that I, the crown prince of this country, the man whom they looked upon as the prototype of all vice and folly, was the man who was guiding their country toward freedom?"

"It was magnificent," Bernhardt gasped, "but incredible!"

John Peters laughed as he laid his hand upon Bernhardt's shoulder. "Nothing is incredible, my friend," he said. "The most astounding things in the world are sometimes brought about most simply."

"But your two lives?" Bernhardt asked. "Your life in Paris, your adventures here? They cannot have been all manufactured."

John Peters laughed softly. "For that, too, there is

an explanation," he said. "Some day I must tell you; but now" — he glanced at the clock — "we must go and talk to our guests."

The men hastened from the room. Bernhardt was walking with uncertain steps, like a man who has received a shock. In front John Peters walked steadily and firmly, his head in the air, and a quiet, confident smile upon his lips. He entered the reception-room and looked around him in wonderment. Quite half the guests still remained, but they were standing about in little groups, talking excitedly, and the faces of many of the women were pale with fright. The band had ceased to play, even the servants stood about helplessly, and from the square outside came every now and then the hoarse thunder of voices, half jeering, half threatening. John Peters turned for a moment to the great windows, and raising the curtain looked outside. The square was packed with the mob, whose faces seemed ghastly pale, and yet distinct, under the light of the torches which they carried. Here and there they had driven long sticks into the ground and bound torches to the top, which burned steadily with a flaring light. As yet they all remained outside the iron palings, and in front of the gates there still walked, with imperturbable footsteps, the sentries on guard. The circular space between the palings and the palace gates was thronged with waiting carriages and motors of every

description. John Peters dropped the curtain and entered the ballroom. His coming seemed to give the people some relief. They would have crowded round him, but he waved them back and walked to the raised steps where the king had been sitting. Then he turned and spoke to them.

"My friends," he said, "I am sorry that your evening here has been spoiled by the coming of these rioters, who seem to hold the square. You will be glad to hear, however, that in an hour's time you will all be able to depart without the slightest fear of any annoyance. In the meantime, I beg that you will amuse yourselves, and accept my assurance that there is not the slightest possibility of any harm coming to any one of you. All that I ask of you is to remember that you are representatives of what is best in birth and education in this city, and that to show fear, or even to feel it, especially when real danger is absent, is an unworthy thing. I am going to ask the band to start and I hope that you will resume the dance."

There was a little murmur of relieved voices, which might have been construed as applause. John Peters walked slowly down from the dais, and as he approached the people his eyes fell upon little Mademoiselle de Holdt. She rose at once, bright-eyed, and trembling a little at her own temerity.

"Once before," she murmured, looking up at him.

"And once again, mademoiselle," he answered, holding

out his arm, and smiling into her face. "If all our women were like you, I think that we should welcome these small disturbances."

The band struck up a waltz and they danced, to be joined in a few moments by many others. They danced until the last bars, and then John Peters led his breathless partner back to where her mother was waiting.

"Little girl," he whispered, "perhaps very soon there will be little left of me in Bergeland but memories. I hope at least that you will not forget our two dances, and that you will not forget the spirit which moved you to give them to me."

She had no words, but she looked at him with swimming eyes, and John Peters, with a very low bow, turned away to mingle with his other guests.

"One hour, I can assure you," he said to the old baroness, Bernhardt's mother. "We arranged it all before I came down. The people are really quite harmless, and it will be put to them by their leaders that their presence here might cause us alarm. You will drive home as safely as you take your afternoon turn in the park in a very short time. Gentlemen, do not forget that the refreshment-rooms are still open."

He made his way at last to where Grace was standing, the centre of a little group of men whom she seemed to be amusing. They fell back respectfully as he approached.

"I am still regretting," he said, as he bowed before her, "my interrupted supper."

"I am sure," she answered, "that you had eaten all that was good for you."

"There was the dessert," he protested, "and the coffee."

She took his arm. "I come under protest," she said, "but I think I should really like some coffee. Tell me, are you amusing yourself with us all, or do you really think we shall be able to get away?"

"I have pledged my word for it," he answered, "and I do not think there is any doubt at all. Only to-morrow the streets will be unsafe for anybody. You must stay in the house and wait."

"What is going to happen?" she asked softly.

"If all goes well," he answered, "what is going to happen sounds a little ignominious, but it is for the best. The king and I shall leave to-morrow afternoon for the frontier. We may go through to Paris, we may stop for a time at the first French town we come to."

"And leave me here?" she asked.

He laughed. "There shall be a place found for you in the special train," he said, "if you are not ashamed to leave Varia with fugitives."

She pressed his hand. "I think," she said, "you know how much shame I should feel in leaving anywhere or going

anywhere with you! There are those awful shouts again! Let us look out of the window. I want to see the people."

They walked out into the corridor. He swept back the great curtains, and again they looked out into the square.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SOME change seemed to have come over the people who thronged the square and park behind. They were no longer motionless, but swayed a little backward and forward, as though pressed by some unseen force. Their attention was no longer directed toward the palace, but up the street, and by leaning a little forward, John Peters and his companion could see men on horseback making their way steadily along through the crowd, and every now and then stopping to address them. On the eastward side the people were falling away.

John Peters nodded approvingly. "Grammont has kept his word," he murmured. "Very soon now the streets will be clear."

He let fall the curtain, and then turned back into the room, strolling about and talking here and there to the men and women, whose sole object now seemed to be to show themselves free from any degree of nervousness.

"The crowd is thinning already," he told every one. "In an hour it will be as I said. Come, it is late, and you are all a little tired of dancing. When I may have the

pleasure of entertaining you again I do not know. Let us all drink a toast to the future of Bergeland!"

They followed him into the supper-room in troops. Somehow or other, to-night he seemed to have laid hold of the imaginations of even the most serious-minded of them. He seemed so unlike the man whose dissipations and strange manner of life had left him outside the circle of their friendship, except when etiquette and ceremonial necessities intervened. Danger, after all, they thought, sometimes brings out the good that is in a man. So it must be with him, for no one could have borne himself more gracefully, or acted the host with greater light-heartedness. The people, following one another like sheep, deserted the salon, and every table in the great supper-room was filled. Their host himself set an example of gaiety that was almost riotous. Grace sat at his right hand, the Baroness de Holdt and her daughter at his left. The Russian ambassador, who had the reputation of being the wittiest man at court, was a few places away. Sir Charles and the French ambassador had left early, under plea of urgent business. John Peters rose to his feet with a glass in his hand.

"My friends," he said, "I want you to drink with me to the future of Bergeland. I want you to drink this toast as I drink it, honestly, heartily, without a single embittering thought. To the future of Bergeland and her people!

May she be better ruled in the future than she has been in the past! May she flourish through all the days and may she take her place, according to her size, among the great powers that have placed civilization, honour, and freedom first and foremost among their ideals! To Bergeland, our country, your country, my country!"

He raised his glass and drank in silence, as did everyone there, and then there rose a shout. Some one started the national anthem. They all joined in. The people whispered as they sat down that something had come to the crown prince which they had never connected with him before; that, after all, perhaps the people were making a mistake; and that it would have been a great thing to be ruled by a man like this. And then the women remembered stories and began to gossip, and the men looked wise. Only Bernhardt, who had a place in a distant corner, sat and watched the crown prince as a man who cannot believe his eyes. The half-hour that followed was almost riotous. Then, at a motion from John Peters, the servants threw back the curtains which hung in front of the great windows. A little murmur of surprise arose from every one. The people had melted away from the square in some extraordinary fashion. There were a few loiterers, not more, and several hundred men on horseback, slowly riding up and down. The great iron gates opening into

the palace grounds were wide open. The stream of carriages and motors still waited.

"My friends," the crown prince said, "it is always sad to see the end of a delightful evening, but one must not impose too much upon one's guests. When you choose to depart, the way, as I promised you, is clear."

Everyone tried to hide their relief, and everyone tried to make their arrangements for departure look as little hurried as possible.

"Who are those men on horseback?" Grace asked John Peters, as they turned away from the room.

"They are part of the new National Guard of the city," he answered, smiling,

"Then will you tell me," she demanded, "how it is that they come at your bidding?"

He smiled. "Well," he said, "there is no reason why you should not know very soon, but not to-night. Let us get to-morrow through, and I will tell you a strange story."

"Shall I see or hear from you to-morrow?" she asked.

"You must not leave your house," he said, "but if I have a chance of coming I shall come, even to take you away with me."

She looked back for a moment as she and Madame de Sayers, among the last to go, made their way between the rows of bowing servants toward the wide-open doors.

John Peters stood there almost alone, looking after his departing guests, his hand resting lightly upon his sword, behind him the deserted ballroom, somehow or other a curiously suggestive background. When she turned round and looked toward the street her eyes were filled with tears. Her mind was suddenly filled with ominous fears; something like a presentiment seemed to depress her. She remembered their first meeting on the lake among the snows, their second at the crowded restaurant, where it seemed to her that she had seen before that curious look on his face which she had tried to explain to the man who had been her escort.

"The Kingdom of Earth!" she repeated softly to herself.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IT WAS along toward three o'clock in the afternoon. For the last three hours every church bell in Varia seemed to have been pealing, and the keys were many and discordant. The streets and squares had all been thronged since daybreak with thousands of townspeople, and trains from every part of the country had been bringing huge crowds from the country districts, all dressed in their best clothes, all with the air of observing a national holiday. The shops were closed, and all the cafés were crowded. Everywhere people were gathered in little groups discussing the events which this day was to bring forth.

In the great library of the palace the king sat waiting. His easy chair had been drawn to the window, and his eyes never left the broad avenue which led straight into the heart of the city. His face was worn and nervous. He seemed to have lost flesh, and his eyes were sunken far back in his head. On one side of him stood a doctor, on the other his secretary.

"That infernal hubbub of bells," he said, "seems to be over. The city must be quieting down. Tell me, doctor, don't you think the city is quieting down, eh?"

The doctor nodded reassuringly. "Without a doubt," he answered.

He glanced at the clock. "Parliament is sitting now," he remarked. "The people are all waiting for the result."

The king muttered something inaudible, and half closed his sunken eyes. Suddenly he opened them again and sat upright in his chair. "News at last!" he exclaimed. "Now we shall know something!"

Down the broad avenue, with the sunlight flashing upon their brilliant uniforms and a cloud of dust behind them, came a small company of soldiers, riding at a furious pace. One man rode in front, a man who, from his great height and wonderful seat, was easily recognizable.

"It is the crown prince!" the doctor exclaimed.

The king knitted his brows. "He ought not to have come away," he said sharply. "His place is with his regiment. He could have sent a message."

"His coming looks like good news," the doctor said smoothly. "His Royal Highness would not have left if things had been serious."

John Peters was in the room a moment later. His face was pale and serious, and he bore the marks of hard riding. The king turned toward him anxiously.

"Why have you left your post, John?" he demanded. "Your place is with the army."

John Peters glanced toward the doctor, who moved hastily to his side.

"The sooner his Majesty knows the worst the better," he whispered. "He is strong enough now to bear the shock, but he is not likely to improve during the next few hours."

"Your Majesty," John Peters answered, "I have brought the army with me — what is left of it. The remainder is being enrolled in the National Guard of the new republic. Grobener has broken his sword, and I heard a rumour as I came away that he had blown out his brains. I am afraid it is true."

"What is going to happen?" the king gasped.

"A deputation from Parliament is on its way here now," John Peters declared.

Even as he spoke there came up the great avenue which divided the park a motor-car driven at frantic speed. The four men watched it with interest. At scarcely abated speed it came tearing through the palace gates, and with a jarring of brakes and a shower of pebbles thrown up into the air it came to a standstill in front of the main entrance. One man sprang out and hastened into the palace. John Peters turned away from the window. He was wondering just what this man might want. A groom of the chambers entered almost immediately.

"Your Royal Highness," he said, "Baron Bernhardt

begs to be allowed to speak with you for a moment without delay."

John Peters glanced toward the king, who seemed to have heard. "Show him in here," he directed.

The man withdrew, and returned almost at once with Bernhardt close at his heels. Seizing John Peters by the arm, Bernhardt drew him to one side. The doctor fell back, and took up his former position beside the king's chair.

"My friend," Bernhardt said, "I have come straight from Parliament, and a report of a secret meeting of the prospective government of this country has been handed to me by my spies. I have come to beg you to do one of two things: Either see Grammont and the rest of the committee at once, and tell them the wonderful story you have told me, or else away now in my motor-car for your life!"

"Are things as bad as that?" John Peters asked.

"Frankly," Bernhardt answered, "for you they are very bad indeed. You seem to have a hundred enemies. The whole of the puritan section is clamouring for what it calls justice. The king will be allowed to depart, if he is wise enough to go, but honestly I doubt whether you will ever reach the railway station. You want the truth. I believe that if you are seen outside the palace you will be dragged from your carriage and shot."

"I must nevertheless run the risk," John Peters answered. "I cannot do either of the things you have suggested."

"Surely you can declare yourself as the Watcher?" Bernhardt argued. "You have only to do so, and you will be safe. I am here to back you up. It will come upon the people like a thunderclap, but it will be your salvation. It cannot do any harm now. The secret has been kept long enough. Frankly, you must do it to save your life."

John Peters shook his head slowly. "No," he said, "I do not think that I shall declare myself. To-day the people have accepted my directions and my teaching like gospel. How do I know but that, if they associate it with the name of a man whom they hate, they will cast it aside discredited? I want them, letter by letter and word by word, to carry out faithfully to the end the scheme which I have laid before them. If they knew that that scheme was planned by the Crown Prince of Bergeland, I fear that all their enthusiasm for it would depart like breath from a glass. No, Bernhardt, I will not risk it, I will not declare myself!"

"You prefer to risk your life," Bernhardt declared impetuously. "Is it that you do not believe me, or that you are a little mad? I tell you that at this moment a mob surrounds the House of Parliament, but directly the

sitting is over it will come here. I tell you that I know something of its spirit. It may let the king go with a jeer but with you it is different. We have wasted time enough already. Take my car quickly. You can reach Vincennes without a stop. After that you must trust to fate; but if you stay here and keep silence, I do not think there is a man in the country who can save you."

John Peters turned away from the window. "My dear friend," he said, "there is a motto whose text, I believe, is 'Save me from my friends!' Now you have come here with the best of intentions, and I thank you for it, but the truth is just as well told soon as late. Never while I am on this Bergeland soil will I open my lips to tell the people what part I have played in these new things, nor will I leave the country except openly, and after I have seen the king safely disposed of."

Bernhardt turned away with a sigh. "I am sorry," he said. "You are a brave man, Prince, and a wonderful one. I have done my best to save you from an ignoble end. I can do no more. I am afraid that even now it would be too late."

Even as he spoke there came from the half-open window a faint sound of distant cheering. The two men stood before the window. Far down the avenue they saw carriages approaching, surrounded by mounted horsemen, and followed by an immense crowd of people on foot.

"They are coming," Bernhardt said. "Grammont is to speak for them, I believe. Tell him the truth. He knows that that message last night came from the palace. He is a quick-witted man, and he will understand and believe."

John Peters shook his head. "If you, my dear friend," he said, "interfere in my concerns, you will find that there will be trouble for you also. I can deal very well with what there is to come." He turned and walked toward the king. "Your Majesty," he said, "there are messengers coming from Parliament. Let me beg you to prepare yourself for giving them a dignified hearing."

The king rose from his chair with some difficulty. He was dressed in the frock coat and dark trousers and prim, precise neckwear which he generally affected. Somehow he seemed shrunken and older than usual. His manner, too, was the manner of a man approaching his second childhood.

"I will see them, John," he said. "I will talk to them, certainly. I hope there is going to be no trouble. I am too old for trouble nowadays. It worries me. You will stay by my side, John?"

"Yes, I shall be here," John Peters said, "and Doctor Reich will not leave you at all. If you find the exertion of talking to these men too great, depute me to do it. I think I know what is best to be said."

The king nodded. "I shall leave it entirely to you," he said, "entirely to you. I am tired to-day. We must have sat up too late last night. I am forgetful, too," he added, drawing his hand across his forehead. "I cannot even remember what it is these men are coming about."

Again the groom of the chambers threw open the door. "Your Majesty," he announced, "there are five gentlemen here from Parliament, who request an immediate audience."

The king stood up once more. "Admit them by all means," he said, "admit them at once."

The five men entered the room. They bowed to the king and to John Peters. He recognized them at once. They had sat at the same table with him half a dozen times, listening to his every word as though he were inspired. They regarded him now in a very different fashion.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

GRAMMONT had been deputed to act as spokesman. Of medium height, stern of feature, direct in speech, he represented to the people the type of a conscientious ruler of their own class. He loved the truth. He spoke what he believed. He was an honest republican to the backbone, hating shams, hating ostentation, contemptuous of all the artificiality of imperial government. He stood before the king respectfully, but without nervousness or fear, and he was prepared to say the things which were in his mind.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I and my friends here have come as the representatives of the new government of this country, which has just been proclaimed and sanctioned by Parliament."

The king smiled amiably, but as one who failed to grasp the purport of the words to which he had listened. The change was apparent at once to every one of them. He was a broken man.

"Sir," he answered, "you will excuse me, but I am not in the best of health to-day. My nephew here, the crown prince, will answer you on my behalf. I leave everything

in his hands, and whatever he pledges himself to I am willing to perform."

He gave another queer little bow, and sat down in his easy chair with the air of one who had no further interest in the proceedings. Grammont turned a little gravely toward the crown prince. His manner was already changed. What there had been in it of respect when he addressed the king was gone now.

"Sir," he said, "the king has appointed you his spokesman. I am here to tell you that the monarchy of the country no longer exists. Parliament, under the full powers which belong to the constitution, has proclaimed Bergeland a republic. The members of the government have been chosen, and have accepted their positions. I have the honour, sir, to address you as president of the Republic of Bergeland."

The crown prince bowed. "Sir," he said, "I congratulate you. Go on."

Grammont for a moment was rather at a loss. John Peters seemed in no wise discomposed. There was even a smile on his face as he looked down upon the man whom he had so often, from underneath his mask and from out of the shadows, directed in the course which he was now pursuing.

"Our object in coming here," Grammont said, "is to inform the king of what has transpired, and to beg him to

leave the country without a moment's delay. Any formal abdication of his sovereignty is unnecessary. A king cannot rule over a republic, and Bergeland has been to-day legally and constitutionally created a republic."

"Under the circumstances," John Peters said, "I agree with you that it is the best thing his Majesty could do."

"There is a special train," Grammont continued, "now waiting at the railway station, and we wish his Majesty to take it. His private effects and his great property will be in no wise affected by the change. We confiscate nothing. His affairs can be administered by any man or body of men he chooses to appoint, but we wish him to leave the country to-day."

John Peters bowed. "And as regards myself," he remarked suavely, "have you any advice or instructions to give me?"

Grammont looked at him with stern, hard face. "Sir," he said, "all that I can give you is advice, and that is, if you have friends, make use of them now. Disguise yourself in any way you can think of. Make use of any means that occurs to you to steal out of the city before the people can stop you. The Republic will protect the king because of his age and a certain moderation which he has always shown in his misdeeds. But for you the people have neither sympathy nor respect. Your life has been a scandal, and the prospect of your ruling this country has

been a nightmare to them. There are many who have personal grievances against you, the nature of which you know well. We would protect you if we could, but we promise nothing. Do the best you can to save yourself."

"I am much obliged to you," John Peters said coolly, "for your plain speaking. It seems to me that I am in a somewhat awkward position. Have you anything more to say to us?"

Grammont hesitated for a moment. He, too, loved brave men, and the splendid indifference of the man whose life was in such terrible danger appealed to him. He glanced toward the window.

"There is nothing more for me to say," he declared, "but most of these things that have come to Bergeland are owing to one man and his command, and it was his wish that the political changes of to-day should be unmarred by any deed of violence. For his sake, then, I beg you to escape without a moment's delay. There are two motor-cars waiting at the back entrance to the palace in the smaller courtyard. Take the route around back of the city to the lower station, where the express is waiting, and you may yet escape the people."

"I thank you," John Peters answered. "I really think that it would be a wise thing to do. Doctor Reich, you will find his Majesty's valet outside. I think we had better take this journey that is being pressed upon us."

Even as he spoke he heard shouting in front of the palace. The gates were being shaken by an angry mob, and a shower of stones came through, falling just short of the window. The king heard the noise and hurried toward the door with feeble footsteps.

"Come, come," he said, "we will get away, we will get away quickly."

Out in the courtyard an unseen hand guided John Peters toward the second of the waiting cars. The king, Doctor Reich, and Bernhardt were already leaving the gates in the first. John Peters stepped in and found himself side by side with Grace. The car leaped forward.

"Don't look so surprised," Grace whispered. "I have been waiting here for an hour. It was Bernhardt who sent me. If there had been any trouble, if you had been obstinate, I was coming in to fetch you."

"You are going with us?" he asked.

She nodded. "Why not? The city has no interest for me now. We will go together to find that other kingdom!" she whispered.

Almost unnoticed the car swept along through the deserted streets. They were on the outskirts of the city, making their way by a circuitous route to the smaller of the two railway stations. No one interfered with their progress. The few people whom they met were hurrying to join the great throngs outside the Parliament House.

from which the new government was even then being proclaimed. So they reached the railway station without challenge or trouble of any sort, to find the train already waiting in the station and the king established in a corner of the saloon. Bernhardt stepped forward to meet them.

"Thank Heaven you are in time!" he said. "You are going through to the frontier, without a stop, and the engineer has orders to disregard any signals that may be telegraphed against you. We shall meet again in Paris."

They stood for a moment with clasped hands. Already John Peters had turned away, and one foot was upon the step, when a man, hatless and disheveled with running, came rushing up the platform. The guard would have stopped him, but with his eyes fixed upon the crown prince he held out what seemed to be a note. John Peters took the half-sheet of note-paper from his fingers and read a few hastily scrawled lines, words traced by a man in peril of his life. He read them and crushed the paper in his hand. The guard from behind blew his whistle.

"If your Highness pleases," he begged.

John Peters stepping into the carriage, took Grace in his arms and kissed her. Then he stepped back upon the platform. Bernhardt looked at him in amazement.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing much," John Peters answered, "but I cannot go. Start the train, Bernhardt, at once. The king is over-excited already. Don't look like that. Nothing that you could say would make any difference."

Grace called to him from the window, and he went back.

"Dear," he said, "I can tell you only this, that I must stay, and when you know everything you will agree with me that there is nothing else that I could do."

She calmly descended from the train. "Very well," she said, "then I, too, shall remain."

"The city is not a fit place for you," he told her gravely, "and it is possible that things may happen which will distress you. You are better away from here, Grace. You cannot help me here. No one can help me."

"I, too," she answered, "have a will of my own, and when I say that I will not go, I will not. You see, it is settled."

The train began to move. The three people walked slowly back toward where the motor-cars were still waiting. As they stepped out into the courtyard they could see the train gliding away toward the open country. From the city which stretched at their feet came the faint roar of voices. Bernhardt laid his hand upon the crown prince's shoulder.

"My friend," he said, "you know, I suppose, all that I can tell you. You know that Grammont, even, will not

guarantee your safety. As I passed through the city, only an hour ago, they were calling out your name. They mean to search for you at the palace."

John Peters turned toward Grace. "I know exactly what I have to fear," he said. "There is no time for me to explain everything now, but there is a certain risk I must run. Bernhardt, I rely upon you to look after Miss Pellisier."

"She will be safer with me than anywhere else," Bernhardt declared. "My office has been confirmed. I am chief commissioner of police in the new republic."

Grace laid her hand upon her lover's arm. "Let me come with you," she begged. "I am not afraid. If there is any danger which you must face, let me face it with you."

He shook his head lightly as he sprang into one of the motor-cars. "It is not possible, dear," he said. "Bernhardt will look after you."

They both gazed after the car, rushing now into the city through a cloud of dust, and Bernhardt shook his head gravely.

"It takes a fool or a brave man," he said, "to tempt Providence so far!"

With his head out of the window John Peters shouted directions to the chauffeur as they drove through the

streets, flying around corners, escaping a collision at almost every turn. In the back streets there were few people, but as they neared the heart of the city the car turned suddenly into the Place de la Concorde. Directly they approached it, they could tell from the roar of voices that it was held by a great throng. The car slackened speed, but the people made way for it quickly. All their attention was turned toward the fountain in the middle of the square, where a dozen or so of men on horseback seemed to be doing their best to protect some fugitive, who was cowering behind. Even as the car came slowly through the throng the mob were closing round with threatening shouts. John Peters pushed open the door of the car. There was no mistaking the shout, which seemed to be on everyone's lips. It was his own name, thundered out in every key of rage and bloodthirsty anger. He sprang from the car, and then with a sweep of his great arms, he flung away the people from either side, and made his way into the little circle.

"Keep off that man," he shouted, in a voice of thunder. "He is not the one you want. I am the crown prince."

There was a moment's strange and tense silence. The man, whose face was already bleeding, looked, with a sudden flash of hope in his face, across to the spot from whence the interruption had come. The people looked from one to the other of the two men in amazement. The

likeness was a marvellous thing. There was the same height, the same figure, the same complexion, the features were the same, only the features of the man who cowered back against the fountain were worn with dissipation and weakened with dissolute living, whereas the lines on the face of the man who strode toward him seemed to spell different things. The people never hesitated for one moment. This man, whose life at their hands had been only a matter of minutes, passed well enough for the crown prince, but the real man there was no mistaking. They rushed at him with a yell, but he too had reached the base of the fountain, and with a sudden wonderful leap he sprang on to the railing out of their reach, balancing himself by touching the brackets which held the electric lights.

"You recognize me?" he cried. "You know who I am?"

A roar of voices filled the air. A stone just missed his forehead, another one cut the coat upon his shoulders.

"Then let that man go," he shouted, but they had already forgotten him.

Closer and closer they strained forward toward the man who towered for a moment out of their reach.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A WOMAN with hot eyes and aching forehead stood before the open window of one of the topmost apartments in a great building, gazing toward the city. The street below was almost deserted. The few people who passed along were either running or walking rapidly toward the heart of the city, from which there continuously came through the still air a confused babel of sounds. Bells were pealing, fireworks every now and then tore up into the black sky, and the roar of voices, ceaseless, thrilling, was like the incoming tide of a great sea. The woman had stood there for nearly an hour, waiting and listening. At last she dropped the curtain and turned back into the room.

"If only one could hear," she murmured.

She walked restlessly up and down the room. Once she stopped and leaned affectionately over the chair where John Peters had last sat.

"If they kill him!" she muttered; "if they dare to kill him!"

She was suddenly attentive. She heard a step upon the stairs. She crept to the door and softly opened it. A tall

figure in a long cloak sprang in and leaned for a moment against the wall, breathless. She gave a little welcoming cry. It was John Peters.

"Lock the door!" he begged. "Give me some wine, quick!"

Then she saw that there were wounds on his face and that his clothes were torn, but she did not hesitate for a moment. She sprang to a cupboard and placed glasses and a bottle upon the table, and with firm fingers poured out the wine and held it to his lips.

"You will be safe here," she said quietly. "Sit down and rest for a moment. I will get you water. You must bathe your face."

He threw off his long coat, and drawing out his sword laid it upon the table. She shivered as she saw that it was stained and dented with use.

"I never meant," he said bitterly, "to use that against my own people, but God knows life is sweet, and they forced it on me. They were the scum of the city, and they would have torn me limb from limb. Marie, they are almost sure to track me here. Are you afraid?"

"God knows I am not!" she cried passionately. "They can kill me, too, if they like. Here, drink some more wine."

She forced it down his throat, and hurrying away,

returned with a basin and water. He plunged his head in and drew a long breath of relief.

"Well, if they come," he said, "they shall not take me alive. If only I can lie hidden for a few hours until Bernhardt has seen Grammont and the others, I shall be safe. Give me a cigarette, Marie."

He leaned back in a chair for a moment and closed his eyes. For six hours he had practically been fighting for his life, and now he felt that the rest was making a new man of him. And all the time Marie watched and listened. She stood by the window with her face turned toward the city.

"Can you hear anything?" he asked sleepily.

"Nothing," she answered.

He closed his eyes and slept. Half an hour passed, an hour. The woman scarcely moved as she continued to gaze cityward with strained eyes. Then suddenly her heart gave one terrible leap. A distant sound grew every second more distinct. Round the corner into the street came trooping a disorderly mob of shouting men, carrying torches and banners, many of them staggering as though half drunk. She heard what it was they were shouting, and she shivered. They were searching for the crown prince, and they called out her name. She stepped over and wakened him.

"My friend," she said, "I am afraid that they have

found you out. There is a mob in the street below. They are coming here to search for you."

He staggered to his feet. She turned out the lights, and he walked to the window and stood looking down.

"Yes," he said, "it is the same crowd, drunken, ignorant, the riffraff of the city. They hunt for me, do they? We shall see!"

He flung off his coat and stood in his shirt and trousers. He took a revolver in his left hand and a sword in his right.

"Marie," he said, "go to the telephone. Ring up Bernhardt, and tell him that I am here, fighting for my life. Tell him that he can tell Grammont what he will, but I will not be killed like a rat in a hole by this scum. Little woman, you had better run away. You can get down into one of the other apartments before they come. It will not be a pretty sight for you."

She stooped and kissed his hand, and disappeared through a connecting door. John Peters stepped outside and looked down the stone staircase. There were a few feet of open space here, and the steps themselves were narrow. If they had no firearms, it was here that he could best defend himself. He felt the point of his sword, and slipped fresh cartridges into the spent chambers of his revolver. Then he stood and waited. He heard them troop into the hall below, and presently he heard the shuffling patter of their footsteps as they came up the stairs. He gripped his

sword and stood waiting. Nearer and nearer they came. At last they reached the final bend and saw him standing there. With a yell of triumph they pushed one another along until they had reached the last two steps. Then they paused for a moment, shouting at him, and calling to those behind to come on. The foremost ones hesitated, for they looked into the dark muzzle of his revolver.

"Listen," he called out, "the first man who steps on to the landing I shoot! Stay there for a moment and listen to me."

They were thick upon the staircase now, and those behind cried angrily to the others to go on, or make way. There were fifty or sixty of them at least, men of all sorts and conditions, some of them half drunk and scarcely knowing what they saw, others extremists who had sought for this man all day and meant to see him dead; and there were one or two who had sworn months before that when the time came his life at least should be forfeited. It was these who struggled so desperately from the rear.

"You cry for the crown prince," he said. "I am the crown prince. What do you want with me?"

"Your life!" they shouted.

"That," he answered, "will do you no good. Come here with any one in authority, bring any one of your new ministers, bring Bernhardt, your new chief of police, and I will prove to you that I am not, nor ever was, any enemy

of your country. I will prove to you, if you will, that I do not deserve death at your hands."

They shouted him down. A long, lean man, over six feet tall, who carried a hatchet, and whose face was already smeared with blood, pushed his way to the front.

"At last!" he shouted, and sprang at John Peters. Then with a sob he fell over, and the hatchet slipped from his fingers a second too soon. He was shot through the heart, and lay across the landing, dead, with scarcely a twitch of the muscles.

"You are fools!" John Peters cried. "Six of you at least will die before you touch me, and I do not want your lives. Keep me a prisoner here while you send for Bernhardt. I will go with him anywhere you say. I will stand trial for anything with which you may charge me."

Those who had joined the party simply for the excitement of the chase hung back and seemed inclined to listen, but there were others on whose faces was a grimmer purpose, and gradually these were pushing their way through to the front. Three of them sprang forward together, but not one of them was able to strike even a blow. One John Peters shot, the other he ran through the body with his sword, and the third, who was in the act of firing a pistol point-blank in his face, was shot by some unseen hand. John Peters half turned his head. It was Marie, who

stood there in her dressing-gown, a revolver in each hand, and her eyes blazing with fury.

"You dogs!" she cried. "You fools!"

"Listen to his mistress!" some one called from the stairs.

"It is a lie," she shouted, "it is a lie, as you will know some day. This is not the man you seek, this is not the man you knew as the crown prince. I tell you that if you touch a hair of his head you will be hated for it all your lives. This is the man who spent his days planning to set you free."

For a moment they hung back, but only for a moment. Her words meant nothing to them. They were half drunk with the lust of fighting, half mad with the memory of their wrongs. This was the man, they were very sure, who had fattened upon their starvation.

There was a push from behind, and they came at him pellmell. The landing was thick with smoke. Stepping backward, both Marie and John Peters emptied their revolvers into the faces of the mob. In that last, desperate struggle no one heard the galloping of horses below, the roar of voices sweeping upward from the street. The two were forced back into the room, and the woman, with a cry, fell backward, striving with her last conscious action to cover him from the pistol held almost to his temple. With one great effort he freed himself from all of them. His sword, broken off short, and streaming with blood, he

brandished in their faces. Then, backing to the wall, he faced them defiantly, still prepared to fight on to the end. But one of them, a little dark-faced man, was creeping up now, nearer and nearer every second, until at last he drew a knife from his blouse and, springing forward suddenly, struck. The broken sword fell from John Peters's hand. He fell over on his side, close to where Marie was lying; her hand somehow reached his and rested there.

"Brutes!" he muttered. "I am sorry, Marie!" and closed his eyes.

Then there came bursting into the room men of different type, Grammont and Bernhardt, followed by a crowd of armed soldiers. Grammont's face was black with fury, and he struck the man who was standing over John Peters's prostrate body such a blow on the head that the knife slipped from his fingers, and he went reeling across the room.

"Assassins! Murderers!" he shouted. "Lieutenant, arrest every one of them. You fools," he cried, "you have killed the man who set you free!"

John Peters opened his eyes and turned his head anxiously toward the woman who lay so still by his side. "Not yet," he answered feebly. "For God's sake, some one send for a doctor to look after Marie. I should have been dead but for her."

Then he closed his eyes again, for the room began to swim.

CHAPTER XL

TWO Americans were standing talking together in a corner of the somewhat overcrowded reception-room. One was the secretary to the American legation at Varia; the other was a friend, a traveller, who had brought with him proper credentials, and was spending a few weeks in the capital.

"Well," the secretary said, "ours is a marvellous country, but I will show you something here which is almost as amazing. You see where the president and his wife are standing receiving? Now, do you see those two who are coming up the stairs, the tall, soldierly looking man with the scars on his face, and the beautiful woman?"

"I see them," his friend answered. "By Jove, the woman is handsome!"

"You hear them announced," the secretary continued, "Mr. and Mrs. John Peters."

"Evidently friends of the president's," the other remarked, as he watched the cordial greetings which were going on.

The secretary smiled. "You have been out of the

world for many years," he said, "and I know that European politics do not interest you at all. You have no idea, I suppose, who Mr. John Peters is?"

"Not the slightest," his friend answered.

"You remember the old King Ferdinand, who was compelled to fly from the country to make room for the republic?"

His friend nodded. "Yes," he said, "I remember hearing about him. He died a few weeks afterward in Paris, did n't he?"

The other nodded. "Well, this is his nephew, the crown prince as he was then, Mr. John Peters as he now calls himself. This is democracy, if you like. There are no end of stories about, but I believe it is perfectly true that the man who engineered the whole revolution, who placed before the people a complete scheme of government, and who has some of the finest ideas that have ever been expressed on the relative position of the state and the people, is that man."

His friend looked with curiosity at John Peters, who, limping slightly, was looking brown and well and was moving about, shaking hands right and left.

"How on earth did he reconcile that sort of thing," he asked, "with his position as crown prince of the country?"

"He did n't attempt to," the secretary replied. "He was a republican by conviction from the first, and when it was decided that his two cousins should be passed over in the succession, and he himself was adopted by King Ferdinand as heir to the throne, he accepted with the secret intention of transforming the government of the country into a republic as quickly as he could. His methods sound rather far-fetched to us, but I suppose they appealed to him at the time; perhaps, even, they were the best. The people were already disgusted with his uncle's deeds, and he himself had a foster-brother who was one of the worst. He used to let this foster-brother scamper about Paris, incognito of course, but always believed to be the crown prince. He let him play all sorts of tricks, even in his own capital, until he himself, in his false personality, was hated as much as the old king. Then he started a socialist campaign throughout the country. He spent all his fortune in socialistic literature and in having the people educated to understand the duties of self-government. He formed a party in the city, of which he was the real head, which rapidly became so powerful that it was able, when the time came and the elections of the country gave it an opportunity, to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic. The only person who came out of the whole thing badly was our friend over there, whose reputation as crown prince was

so bad that the people nearly killed him. Later, however, the truth leaked out, and now there is n't another man so popular in all the country. His wife is partly American, though, and they are here for only about two months in the year."

"I should like to meet them," his friend remarked.

"You probably will if you stay here long," the secretary answered. "They go everywhere. Come, we must be moving on."

John Peters and his wife found it hard to escape from their friends that evening. It was only the second of the presidential receptions, and the rooms were thronged. It was Bernhardt first who kept them talking.

"I do not think you ought to have come," he said. "Don't you know that the Prince de Suess is here?"

John Peters laughed. "He 'll never forgive me," he said. "I heard him explaining only a few minutes ago why it was necessary to hold those sham fights so close to the Bergeland frontier. Nothing ever makes him so angry as to suggest that his imperial master would, under any circumstances, have dreamed of interfering with events in this country. Ah! there is Mademoiselle de Holdt. I must speak to her for one moment."

Mademoiselle de Holdt was talking to a handsome

young officer, but she turned toward John Peters at once directly she met his smiling glance.

"Our friend the president," he said, "is making a very good start, but I have been telling him that he must give us a dance soon."

She looked at him with earnest eyes. "There will never be any dances," she said, "like the dances at the palace."

"They taught me," he answered, "to have faith in our women."

He passed on to rejoin his wife, and soon after they made their adieus. It was getting twilight as their carriage rolled on through the park. Through the trees they could see the curving lights of the great city, and hear the hum of its distant traffic. They passed the palace, almost unrecognizable through the scaffolding, which was now being transformed into a national museum. Their hands touched and gripped each other.

"After all, those were wonderful days," she murmured.

He laughed. "Personally," he said, "I was beginning to find them very uncomfortable ones. Still, it is something to have lived through them. I must confess I feel a good deal more comfortable now that I can walk down to the club without being afraid that some one is going to try to rid the world of a villain."

"What a character you had in those days," she said, smiling.

"It was poor Nicholas's character," he muttered grimly. "The idiot overdid the thing, of course, and paid the penalty. I saved him once, but no power on earth could save him the second time."

"If the story one heard was true," she answered, "he deserved to die. One can't help wishing ——"

"I know what you were going to say," he interrupted, "and yet one wonders sometimes whether it was not the best end."

The carriage stopped at the top of a hill, and they both descended, Grace with a great bunch of white roses in her hand. They passed between a yew hedge, up some stone steps, into a tiny chapel. They stopped in a quiet corner, where upon a marble slab was a very simple inscription, "Marie, who died for a friend." The white roses fell in a shower over the little tablet. Some one was playing the organ softly, and the candles burned with a dim light over the tomb. They stood there in silence for a minute, and then walked back to where the carriage was waiting. Twilight had deepened into evening, and the lights of the great city, which stretched away on every side below them, flared up to the sky. They walked in silence down the path.

"Life," she said softly, "is a splendid thing, when

one can do great things in the world; but there are times, though, when I think that death is more splendid."

"Too often," he answered, looking back toward the chapel, "it is the man who lives and the woman who dies."

THE END

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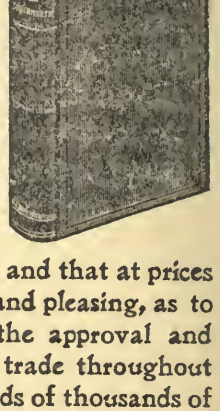

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